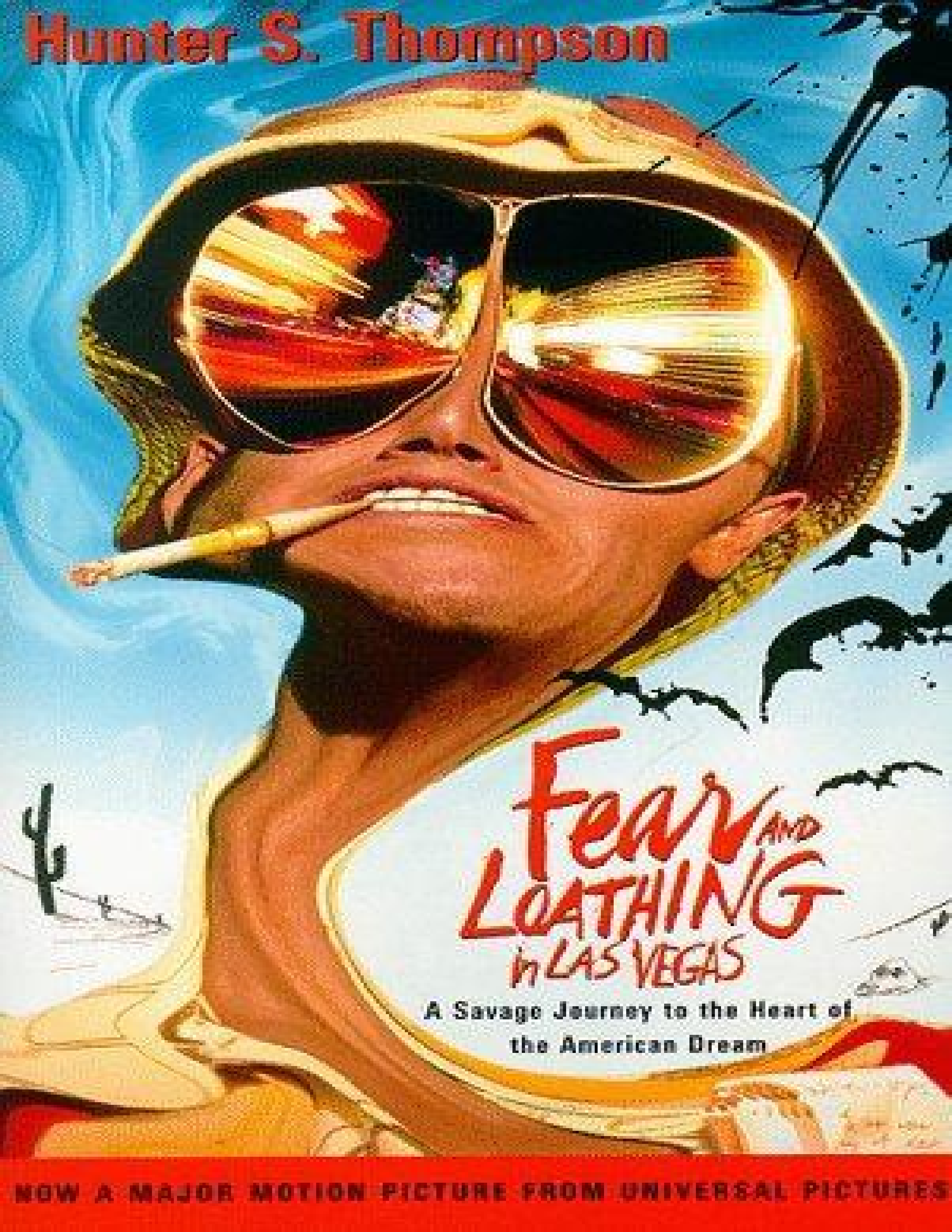

Hunter S. Thompson
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas
A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream
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Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas

by Thompson, Hunter S.

To Bob Geiger, for reasons that need not be explained here - and to Bob Dylan, for Mister Tambourine Man

“He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.”

Dr. Johnson

Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas

PART ONE

We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold. I remember saying something like "I feel a bit lightheaded; maybe you should drive... ." And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas. And a voice was screaming: "Holy Jesus! What are these goddamn animals?" Then it was quiet again. My attorney had taken his shirt off and was pouring beer on his chest, to facilitate the tanning process. "What the hell are you yelling about?" he muttered, staring up at the sun with his eyes closed and covered with wraparound Spanish sunglasses. "Never mind," I said. "It's your turn to drive." I hit the brakes and aimed the Great Red Shark toward the shoulder of the highway. No point mentioning those bats, I thought. The poor bastard will see them soon enough.

It was almost noon, and we still had more than a hundred miles to go. They would be tough miles. Very soon, I knew, we would both be completely twisted. But there was no going back, and no time to rest. We would have to ride it out. Press registration for the fabulous Mint 400 was already underway, and we had to get there by four to claim our sound—proof suite. A fashionable sporting magazine in New York had taken care of the reservations, along with this huge red Chevy convertible we'd just rented off a lot on the Sunset Strip...and I was, after all, a professional journalist; so I had an obligation to cover the story, for good or ill.

The sporting editors had also given me $300 in cash, most of which was already spent on extremely dangerous drugs. The trunk of the car looked like a mobile police narcotics lab. We had two bags of grass, seventy—five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high—powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multi—colored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers and also a quart of tequila, a quart of rum, a case of Budweiser, a pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls.All this had been rounded up the night before, in a frenzy of high—speed driving all over Los Angeles County—from Topanga to Watts, we picked up everything we could get our hands on. Not that we needed all that for the trip, but once you get locked into a serious drug collection, the tendency is to push it as far as you can.

The only thing that really worried me was the ether. There is nothing in the world more helpless and irresponsible and depraved than a man in the depths of an ether binge. And I knew we'd get into that rotten stuff pretty soon. Probably at the next gas station. We had sampled almost everything else, and now—yes, it was time for a long snort of ether. And then do the next hundred miles in a horrible, slobbering sort of spastic stupor. The only way to keep alert on ether is to do up a lot of amyls—not all at once, but steadily, just enough to maintain the focus at ninety miles an hour through Barstow.

"Man, this is the way to travel," said my attorney. He leaned over to turn the volume up on the radio, humming along withthe rhythm section and kind of moaning the words: "One toke over the line, Sweet Jesus...One toke over the line... " One toke? You poor fool! Wait till you see those goddamn bats. I could barely hear the radio...slumped over on the far side of the seat, grappling with a tape recorder turned all the way up on "Sympathy for the Devil." That was the only tape we had, so we played it constantly, over and over, as a'kind of demented counterpoint to the radio. And also to maintain our rhythm on the road. A constant speed is good for gas mileage—and for some reason that seemed important at the time. Indeed. On a trip like this one must be careful about gas consumption. Avoid those quick bursts of acceleration that drag blood to the back of the brain.

My attorney saw the hitchhiker long before I did. "Let's give this boy a lift," he said, and before I could mount any argument he was stopped and this poor Okie kid was running up to the car with a big grin on his face, saying, "Hot damn! I never rode in a convertible before!"

"Is that right?" I said. "Well, I guess you're about ready, eh?" The kid nodded eagerly as we roared off.

"We're your friends," said my attorney. "We're not like the others."

"O Christ, I thought, he's gone around the bend. "No more of that talk," I said sharply. "Or I'll put the leeches on you." He grinned, seeming to understand. Luckily, the noise in the car was so awful—between the wind and the radio and the tape machine—that the kid in the back seat couldn't hear a word we were saying. Or could he?

How long can we maintain? I wondered. How long before one of us starts raving and jabbering at this boy? What will he think then? This same lonely desert was the last known home of the Manson family. Will he make

that grim connection when my attorney starts screaming about bats and huge manta rays coming down on the car? If so—well, we'll just have to cut his head off and bury him somewhere. Because it goes without saying that we can't turn him loose. He'll report us at once to some kind of outback nazi law enforcement agency, and they'll run us down like dogs.

Jesus! Did I say that? Or just think it? Was I talking? Did they hear me? I glanced over at my attorney, but he seemed oblivious—watching the road, driving our Great Red Shark along at a hundred and ten or so. There was no sound from the back seat.Maybe I'd better have a chat with this boy, I thought. Perhape if I explain things, he'll rest easy.

Of course. I leaned around in the seat and gave him a fine big smile...admiring the shape of his skull."By the way," I said. "There's one thing you should probably understand." He stared at me, not blinking. Was he gritting his teeth?

"Can you hear me?" I yelled.

He nodded.

"That's good," I said. "Because I want you to know that we're on our way to Las Vegas to find the American Dream." I smiled. "That's why we rented this car. It was the only way to do it. Can you grasp that?" He nodded again, but his eyes were nervous.

"I want you to have all the background," I said. "Because this is a very ominous assignment—with overtones of extreme personal danger....Hell, I forgot all about this beer; you want one?" He shook his head.

"How about some ether?" I said.

"What?"

"Never mind. Let's get right to the heart of this thing. You see, about twenty—four hours ago we were sitting in the Polo Lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel—in the patio section, of course—and we were just sitting there under a palm tree when this uniformed dwarf came up to me with a pink telephone and said, 'This must be the call you've been waiting for all this time, sir.'" I laughed and ripped open a beer can that foamed all over the back seat while I kept talking. "And you know? He was right! I'd been expecting that call, but I didn't know who it would come from. Do you follow me?" The boy's face was a mask of pure fear and bewilderment. I blundered on: "I want you to understand that this man at the wheel is my attorney! He's not just some dingbat I found on the Strip. Shit, look at him! He doesn't look like you or me, right? That's because he's a foreigner. I

think he’s probably Samoan. But it doesn’t matter, does it? Are you prejudiced?"

“Oh, hell no!” he blurted.

“I didn’t think so,” I said. “Because in spite of his race, this man is extremely valuable to me.” I glanced over at my attorney, but his mind was somewhere else.

I whacked the back of the driver’s seat with my fist. “This is important, goddamnit! This is a true story!” The car swerved sickeningly, then straightened out. “Keep your hands off my fucking neck!” my attorney screamed. The kid in the back looked like he wasready to jump right out of the car and take his chances.Our vibrations were getting nasty—but why? I was puzzled, frustrated. Was there no communication in this car? Had we deteriorated to the level of dumb beasts?

Because my story was true. I was certain of that. And it was extremely important, I felt, for the meaning of our journey to be made absolutely clear. We had actually been sitting there in the Polo Lounge—for many hours—drinking Singapore Slings with mescal on the side and beer chasers. And when the call came, I was ready.

The Dwark approached our table cautiously, as I recall, and when he handed me the pink telephone I said nothing, merely listened. And then I hung up, turning to face my attorney. “That was headquarters,” I said. “They want me to go to Las Vegas at once, and make contact with a Portuguese photographer named Lacerda. He’ll have the details. All I have to do is check into my suite and he’ll seek me out.” My attorney said nothing for a moment, then he suddenly came alive in his chair. “God hell!” he exclaimed. “I think I see the pattern. This one sounds like real trouble!” He tucked his khaki undershirt into his white rayon bellbottoms and called for more drink. “You’re going to need plenty of legal advice before this thing is over,” he said. “And my first advice is that you should rent a very fast car with no top and get the hell out of L.A. for at least forty—eight hours.” He shook his head sadly. “This blows my weekend, because naturally I’ll have to go with you—and we’ll have to ann ourselves."

“Why not?” I said. “If a thing like this is worth doing at all, it’s worth doing right. We’ll need some decent equipment and plenty of cash on the line—if only for drugs and a super—sensitive tape recorder, for the sake of a permanent record."

“What kind of a story is this?” he asked.

“The Mint 400,” I said. “It’s the richest off—the—road race for motorcycles and dune—buggies in the history of organized sport—a fantastic spectacle in honor of some fatback grossero named Del Webb, who owns the luxurious Mint Hotel in the heart of downtown Las Vegas...at least that’s what the press release says; my man in New York just read it to me."

“Well,” he said, “as your attorney I advise you to buy a motorcycle. How else can you cover a thing like this righteously?"

“No way,” I said. “Where can we get hold of a Vincent Black Shadow?"

“What’s that?"

“A fantastic bike,” I said. “The new model is something like two thousand cubic inches, developing two hundred brake—horsepower at four thousand revolutions per minute on a magnesium frame with two styrofoam seats and a total curb weight of exactly two hundred pounds."

“That sounds about right for this gig,” he said.

“It is” I assured him. “The fucker’s not much for turning, but it’s pure hell on the straightaway. It’ll outrun the F—ill until takeoff."

“Takeoff?” he said. “Can we handle that much torque?"

“Absolutely,” I said. “I’ll call New York for some cash.”

2. The Seizure of $300 from a Pig Woman In Beverly Hills

The New York office was not familiar with the Vincent Black Shadow: they referred me to the Los Angeles bureau—which is actually in Beverly Hills just a few long blocks from the Polo Lounge—but when I got there, the money—woman refused to give me more than $300 in cash. She had no idea who I was, she said, and by that time I was pouring sweat. My blood is too thick for California: I have never been able to properly explain myself in this climate. Not with the soaking sweats...wild red eyeballs and trembling hands.

So I took the $300 and left. My attorney was waiting in a bar around the corner. “This won’t make the nut,” he said, “unless we have unlimited credit.” I assured him we would. “You Samoans are all the same,” I told him. “You have no faith in the essential decency of the white man’s culture. Jesus, just one hour ago we were sitting over there in that stinking baiginio, stone broke and paralyzed for the weekend, when a call comes through from some total stranger in New York, telling me to go to Las Vegas and expenses be damned—and then he sends me over to some office in Beverly Hills where another total stranger gives me $300 raw cash for no reason at

all...I tell you, my man, this is the American Dream in action! We'd be fools not to ride this strange torpedo all the way out to the end."

"Indeed," he said. "We must do it."

"Right," I said. "But first we need the car. And after that, the cocaine. And then the tape recorder, for special music, and some Acapulco shirts." The only way to prepare for a trip like this, I felt, was to dress up like human peacocks and get crazy, then screech off across the desert and cover the stary. Never lose sight of the primary responsibility. But what was the story? Nobody had bothered to say. So we would have to drum it up on our own. Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas. Do it now: pure Gonzo journalism.

There was also the socio—psychic factor. Every now and then when your life gets complicated and the weasels start closing in, the only real cure is to load up on heinous chemicals and then drive like a bastard from Hollywood to Las Vegas. To relax, as it were, in the womb of the desert sun. Just roll the roof back and screw it on, grease the face with white tanning butter and move out with the music at top volume, and at least a pint of ether.

Getting hold of the drugs had been no problem, but the car and the tape recorder were not easy things to round up at 6:30 on a Friday afternoon in Hollywood. I already had one car, but it was far too small and slow for desert work. We went to a Polynesian bar, where my attorney made seventeen calls before locating a convertible with adequate horsepower and proper coloring.

"Hang onto it," I heard him say into the phone. "We'll be over to make the trade in thirty minutes." Then after a pause, he began shouting: "What? Of course the gentleman has a major credit card! Do you realize who the fuck you're talking to?"

"Don't take any guff from these swine," I said as he slammed the phone down. "Now we need a sound store with the finest equipment. Nothing dinky. We want one of those new Belgian Heliowatts with a voice—activated shotgun mike, for picking up conversations in oncoming cars." We made several more calls and finally located our equip—ment in a store about five miles away. It was closed, but the salesman said he would wait, if we hurried. But we were de—layed en route when a Stingray in front of us killed a pedestrian on Sunset Boulevard. The store was closed by the time

we got there. There were people inside, but they refused to come to the double—glass door until we gave it a few belts and made ourselves clear.

Finally two salesmen brandishing tire irons came to the door and we managed to negotiate the sale through a tiny slit. Then they opened the door just wide enough to shove the equipment out, before slamming and locking it again. “Now take that stuff and get the hell away from here,” one of them shouted through the slit.

My attorney shook his fist at them. “We’ll be back,” he yelled. “One of these days I’ll toss a fucking bomb into this place! I have your name on this sales slip! I’ll find out where you live and burn your house down!"

“That’ll give him something to think about,” he muttered as we drove off. “That guy is a paranoid psychotic, anyway. They’re easy to spot.” We had trouble, again, at the car rental agency. After signing all the papers, I got in the car and almost lost control of it while backing across the lot to the gas pump. The rental—man was obviously shaken.

“Say there...uh...you fellas are going to be careful with this car, aren’t you?"

“Of course."

“Well, good god!” he said. “You just backed over that two—foot concrete abutment and you didn’t even slow down! Forty—five in reverse! And you barely missed the pump!"

“No harm done,” I said. “I always test a transmission that way. The rear end. For stress factors.” Meanwhile, my attorney was busy transferring rum and ice from the Pinto ~ the back seat of the convertible. The rental—man watched him nervously.

“Say,” he said. “Are you fellas drinking?"

“Not me,” I said.

“Just fill the goddamn tank,” my attorney snapped. “We’re in a hell of a hurry. We’re on our way to Las Vegas for a desert race.

“What?"

“Never mind,” I said. “We’re responsible people.” I watched him put the gas cap on, then I jammed the thing into low gear and we lurched into traffic.

“There’s another worrier,” said my attorney. “He’s prob—ably all cranked up on speed."

“Yeah, you should have given him some reds."

“Reds wouldn’t help a pig like that,” he said. “To hell with him. We have a lot of business to take care of, before we can get on the road."

“I’d like to get hold of some priests’ robes,” I said. “They might come in handy in Las Vegas.” But there were no costume stores open, and we weren’t up to burglarizing a church. “Why bother?” said my attorney. “And you have to remember that a lot of cops are good vicious Catholics. Can you imagine what those bastards would do to us if we got busted all drugged—up and drunk in stolen investments? Jesus, they’d castrate us!"

“You’re right,” I said. “And for christ’s sake don’t smoke that pipe at stoplights. Keep in mind that we’re exposed.” He nodded. “We need a big hookah. Keep it down here on the seat, out of sight. If anybody sees us, they’ll think we’re using oxygen.” We spent the rest of that night rounding up materials and packing the car. Then we ate the mescaline and went swimming in the ocean. Somewhere around dawn we had breakfast in a Malibu coffee shop, then drove very carefully across town and plunged onto the smog—shrouded Pasadena Freeway, heading East.

3. Strange Medicine On The Desert...A Crisis Of Confidence

I am still vaguely haunted by our hitchhiker’s remark about how he’d “never rode in a convertible before.” Here’s this poor geek living in a world of convertibles zipping past him on the highways all the time, and he’s never even ridden in one. It made me feel like King Farouk. I was tempted to have my attorney pull into the next airport and arrange some kind of simple, common—law contract whereby we could just give the car to this unfortunate bastard. Just say: “Here, sign this and the car’s yours.” Give him the keys and then use the credit card to zap off on a jet to some place like Miami and rent another huge fireapple—red convertible for a drug—addled, top—speed run across the water all the way out to the last stop in Key West...and then trade the car off for a boat. Keep moving.

But this manic notion passed quickly. There was no point in getting this harmless kid locked up—and, besides, I had plans for this car. I was looking forward to flashing around Las Vegas in the bugger. Maybe do a bit of serious drag—racing on the Strip: Pull up to that big stoplight in front of the Flamingo and start screaming at the traffic: “Alright, you chickenshit wimps! You pansies! When this goddamn light flips green, I’m gonna stomp down on this thing and blow every one of you gutless punks off the road!” Right. Challenge the bastards on their own turf. Come Screeching up to the crosswalk, bucking and skidding with a bottle of rum in one hand and

jamming the horn to drown out the music...glazed eyes insanely dilated behind tiny black, gold—rimmed greaser shades, screaming gibberish.., a genuinely dangerous drunk, reeking of ether and terminal psychosis. Revving the engine up to a terrible high—pitched chattering whine, waiting for the light to change...

How often does a chance like that come around? To jangle the bastards right down to the core of their spleens. Old elephants limp off to the hills to die; old Americans go out to the highway and drive themselves to death with huge cars.

But our trip was different. It was a classic affirmation of everything right and true and decent in the national character. It was a gross, physical salute to the fantastic possibilities of life in this country—but only for those with true grit. And we were chock full of that.

My attorney understood this concept, despite his racial handicap, but our hitchhiker was not an easy person to reach. He said he understood, but I could see in his eyes that he didn't. He was lying to me.

The car suddenly veered off the road and we came to a sliding halt in the gravel. I was hurled against the dashboard. My attorney was slumped over the wheel. "What's wrong?" I yelled. "We can't stop here. This is bat country!"

"My heart," he groaned. "Where's the medicine?"

"Oh," I said. "The medicine, yes, it's right here." I reached into the kit—bag for the amyls. The kid seemed petrified. "Don't worry," I said. "This man has a bad heart—Angina Pectoris. But we have the cure for it. Yes, here they are." I picked four amyls out of the tin box and handed two of them to my attorney. He immediately cracked one under his nose, and I did likewise.

He took a long snort and fell back on the seat, staring straight up at the sun. "Turn up the fucking music!" he screamed. "My heart feels like an alligator!

"Volume! Clarity! Bass! We must have bass!" He flailed his naked arms at the sky. "What's wrong with us? Are we god—damn old ladies?" I turned both the radio and the tape machine up full bore. "You scurvy shyster bastard," I said. "Watch your language! You're talking to a doctor of journalism!" He was laughing out of control. "What the fuck are we doing out here on this desert?" he shouted. "Somebody call the police! We need help!"

“Pay no attention to this swine,” I said to the hitchhiker. “He can’t handle the medicine. Actually, we’re both doctors of journalism, and we’re on our way to Las Vegas to cover the main story of our generation.” And then I began laughing ... .

My attorney hunched around to face the hitchhiker. “The truth is,” he said, “we’re going to Vegas to croak a scag baron named Savage Henry. I’ve known him for years, but he ripped us off—and you know what that means, right?” I wanted to shut him off, but we were both helpless with laughter. What the fuck were we doing out here on this desert, when we both had bad hearts?

“Savage Henry has cashed his check!” My attorney snarled at the kid in the back seat. “We’re going to rip his lungs out!"

“And eat them!” I blurted. “That bastard won’t get away with this! What’s going on in this country when a scumsucker like that can get away with sandbagging a doctor of journalism?” Nobody answered. My attorney was cracking another amyl and the kid was climbing out of the back seat, scrambling down the trunk lid. “Thanks for the ride,” he yelled. “Thanks a lot. I like you guys. Don’t worry about me.” His feet hit the asphalt and he started running back towards Baker. Out in the middle of the desert, not a tree in sight.

Wait a minute,” I yelled. “Come back and get a beer.” But apparently he couldn’t hear me. The music was very loud, and he was moving away from us at good speed.

“Good riddance,” said my attorney. “We had a real freak on our hands. That boy made me nervous. Did you see his eyes?” He was still laughing. “Jesus,” he said. “This is good medicine!” I opened the door and reeled around to the driver’s side. “Move over,” I said. “I’ll drive. We have to get out of Califor—nia before that kid finds a cop."

“Shit, that’ll be hours,” said my attorney. “He’s a hundred miles from anywhere."

“So are we,” I said.

“Let’s turn around and drive back to the Polo Lounge,” he said. “They’ll never look for us there.” I ignored him. “Open the tequila,” I yelled as the wind—scream took over again; I stomped on the accelerator as we hurtled back onto the highway. Moments later he leaned over with a map. “There’s a place up ahead called Mescal Springs,” he said. “As your attorney, I advise you to stop and take a swim.

I shook my head. “It’s absolutely imperative that we get to the Mint Hotel before the deadline for press registration,” I said. “Otherwise, we might have to pay for our suite.” He nodded. “But let’s forget that bullshit about the American Dream,” he said. “The important thing is the Great Samoan Dream.” He was rummaging around in the kit—bag. “I think it’s about time to chew up a blotter,” he said. “That cheap mescaline wore off a long time ago, and I don’t know if 1 can stand the smell of that goddamn ether any longer."

“I like it,” I said. “We should soak a towel with the stuff and then put it down on the floorboard by the accelerator so the fumes will rise up in my face all the way to Las Vegas.” He was turning the tape cassette over. The radio was screaming: “Power to the People—Right On!” John Lennon’s political song, ten years too late. “That poor fool should have stayed where he was,” said my attorney. “Punks like that just get in the way when they try to be serious."

“Speaking of serious,” I said. “I think it’s about time to get into the ether and the cocaine."

“Forget ether,” he said. “Let’s save it for soaking down the rug in the suite. But here’s this. Your half of the sunshine blotter. Just chew it up like baseball gum.” I took the blotter and ate it. My attorney was now fumbling with the salt shaker containing the cocaine. Opening it. Spilling it. Then screaming and grabbing at the air, as our fine white dust blew up and out across the desert highway. A very expensive little twister rising up from the Great Red Shark.

“Oh, Jesus!” he moaned. “Did you see what God just did to us?"

“God didn’t do that!” I shouted. “You did it. You’re a fucking narcotics agent! I was on to your stinking act from the start, you pig!"

“You better be careful,” he said. And suddenly he was waving a fat black .357 magnum at me. One of those snubnosed Colt Python 5 with the beveled cylinder. “Plenty of vultures out here,” he said. “They’ll pick your bones clean before morning."

“You whore” I said. “When we get to Las Vegas I’ll have you chopped into hamburger. What do you think the Drug Bund will do when I show up with a Samoan narcotics agent?"

“They’ll kill us both,” he said. “Savage Henry knows who I am. Shit, I’m your attornney” He burst into wild laughter.

“You’re full of acid, you fool. It’ll be a goddamn miracle if we can get to the hotel and check in before you turn into a wild animal. Are you ready for that? Checking into a Vegas hotel under a phony name with intent to commit capital fraud and a head full of acid?” He was laughing again, then he jammed his nose down toward the salt shaker, aiming the thin green roll of a $20 bill straight into what was left of the powder.

“How long do we have?” I said.

“Maybe thirty more minutes,” he replied. “As your attorney I advise you to drive at top speed.” Las Vegas was just up ahead. I could see the strip/hotel skyline looming up through the blue desert ground—haze: The Sahara, the landmark, the Americana and the ominous Thunderbird—a cluster of grey rectangles in the distance, rising out of the cactus.

Thirty minutes. It was going to be very close. The objective was the big tower of the Mint Hotel, downtown—and if we didn’t get there before we lost all control, there was also the Nevada State prison upstate in Carson City. I had been there once, but only for a talk with the prisoners—and I didn’t want to go back, for any reason at all. So there was really no choice: We would have to run the gauntlet, and acid be damned. Go through all the official gibberish, get the car into the hotel garage, work out on the desk clerk, deal with the bellboy, sign in for the press passes—all of it bogus, totally illegal, a fraud on its face, but of course it would have to be done.

“KILL THE BODY AND THE HEAD WILL DIE”

This line appears in my notebook, for some reason. Perhaps some connection with Joe Frazier. Is he still alive? Still able to talk? I watched that fight in Seattle—horribly twisted about four seats down the aisle from the Governor. A very painful experience in every way, a proper end to the sixties Tim Leary a prisoner of Eldridge Cleaver in Algeria, Bob Dylan clipping coupons in Greenwich Village, both Kennedysmurdered by mutants, Owsley folding napkins on Terminal Island, and finally Cassius/Ali belted incredibly off his pedestal by a human hamburger, a man on the verge of death. Joe Frazier, like Nixon, had finally prevailedfor reasons that people like me refused to understand—at least not out loud.

But that was some other era, burned out and long gone from the brutish realities of this foul year of Our Lord, 1971. A lot of things had changed in those years. And now I was in Las Vegas as the motor sports editor of this fine slick magazine that had sent me out here in the Great Red Shark for

some reason that nobody claimed to understand. “Just check it out,” they said, “and we’ll take it from there.

Indeed. Check it out. But when we finally arrived at the Mint Hotel my attorney was unable to cope artfully with the registration procedure. We were forced to stand in line with all the others—which proved to be extremely difficult under the circumstances. I kept telling myself: “Be quiet, be calm, say nothing...speak only when spoken to: name, rank and press affiliation, nothing else, ignore this terrible drug, pretend it’s not happening...There is no way to explain the terror I felt when I finally lunged up to the clerk and began babbling. All my well—re—hearsed lines fell apart under that woman’s stoney glare. “Hi there,” I said. “My name is...ah, Raoul Duke...yes, on the list, that’s for sure. Free lunch, final wisdom, total coverage....why not? I have my attorney with me and I realize of course that his name is not on the list, but we must have that suite, yes, this man is actually my driver. We brought this Red Shark all the way from the Strip and now it’s time for the desert, right? Yes. Just check the list and you’ll see. Don’t worry. What’s the score here? What’s next?”

The woman never blinked. “Your room’s not ready yet,” she said. “But there’s somebody looking for you."

“No!” I shouted. “Why? We haven’t done anything yet!” My legs felt rubbery. I gripped the desk and sagged toward her as she held out the envelope, but I refused to accept it. The Woman’s face was changing: swelling, pulsing...horrible green jowls and fangs jutting out, the face of a Moray Eel! Deadly poison! I lunged backwards into my attorney, who gripped my arm as he reached out to take the note. “I’ll handle this,” he said to the Moray woman. “This man has a bad heart, but I have plenty of medicine. My name is Doctor Gonzo. Prepare our suite at once. We’ll be in the bar.” The woman shrugged as he led me away. In a town full of bedrock crazies, nobody even notices an acid freak. We struggled through the crowded lobby and found two stools at the bar. My attorney ordered two cuba libres with beer and mescal on the side, then he opened the envelope. “Who’s Lacerda?” he asked. “He’s waiting for us in a room on the twelfth floor.” I couldn’t remember. Lacerda? The name rang a bell, but I couldn’t concentrate. Terrible things were happening all around us. Right next to me a huge reptile was gnawing on a woman’s neck, the carpet was a blood—soaked sponge—impossible to walk on it, no footing at all. “Order some golf shoes,” I whispered. “Otherwise, we’ll never get out of this place alive.

You notice these lizards don't have any trouble moving around in this muck—that's because they have claws on their feet."

"Lizards?" he said. "If you think we're in trouble now, wait till you see what's happening in the elevators." He took off his Brazilian sunglasses and I could see he'd been crying. "I just went upstairs to see this man Lacerda," he said. "I told him we knew what he was up to. He says he's a photographer, but when I mentioned Savage Henry—well, that did it; he freaked. I could see it in his eyes. He knows we're onto him."

"Does he understand we have magnums?" I said.

"No. But I told him we had a Vincent Black Shadow. That scared the piss out of him."

"Good," I said. "But what about our room? And the golf shoes? We're right in the middle of a fucking reptile zoo! And somebody's giving booze to these goddamn things! It won't be long before they tear us to shreds. Jesus, look at the floor! Have you ever seen so much blood? How many have theykilled already?" I pointed across the room to a group that seemed to be staring at us. "Holy shit, look at that bunch over there! They've spotted us!"

"That's the press table," he said. "That's where you have to sign in for our credentials. Shit, let's get it over with. You handle that, and I'll get the room."

4. Rude Music And The Sound Of Many Shotguns...Rude Vibes On A Saturday Evening In Vegas

We finally got into the suite around dusk, and my attorney was immediately on the phone to room service—ordering four club sandwiches, four shrimp cocktails, a quart of rum and nine fresh grapefruits. "Vitamin C," he explained. "We'll need all we can get." I agreed. By this time the drink was beginning to cut the acid and my hallucinations were down to a tolerable level. The room service waiter had a vaguely reptilian cast to his features, but I was no longer seeing huge pterodactyls lumbering around the corridors in pools of fresh blood. The only problem now was a gigantic neon sign outside the window, blocking our view of the mountains—millions of colored balls running around a very complicated track, strange symbols & filigree, giving off a loud hum.

"Look outside," I said.

"Why?"

“There’s a big .. . machine in the sky,...some kind of electric snake...coming straight at us."

“Shoot it,” said my attorney.

“Not yet,” I said. “I want to study its habits.” He went over to the corner and began pulling on a chain todrapes. “Look,” he said, “you’ve got to stop this talk snakes and leeches and lizards and that stuff. It’s making me sick."

“Don’t worry,” I said.

“Worry? Jesus, I almost went crazy down there in the bar. They’ll never let us back in that place—not after your scene at the press table."

“What scene?"

“You bastard,” he said. “I left you alone for three minutes! You scared the shit out of those people! Waving that goddamn marlin spike around and yelling about reptiles. You’re lucky I came back in time. They were ready to call the cops. I said you were only drunk and that I was taking you up to your room for a cold shower. Hell,the only reason they gave us the press passes was to get you out of there.” He was pacing around nervously. “Jesus, that scene straightened me right out! I must have some drugs. What have you done with the mescaline?"

“The kit—bag,” I said.

He opened the bag and ate two pellets while I got the tape machine going. “Maybe you should only eat one of these,” he said. “That acid’s still working on you.” I agreed. “We have to go out to the track before dark,” I said. “But we have time to watch the TV news. Let’s carve up this grapefruit and make a fine rum punch, maybe toss in a blotter...where’s the car?"

“We gave it to somebody in the parking lot,” he said. “I have the ticket in my briefcase."

“What’s the number? I’ll call down and have them wash the bastard, get rid of that dust and grime."

“Good idea,” he said. But he couldn’t find the ticket.

“Well, we’re fucked,” I said. “We’ll never convince them to give us that car without proof.” He thought for a moment, then picked up the phone and asked for the garage. “This is Doctor Gonzo in eight fifty,” he said. “I seem to have lost my parking stub for that red convertible I left with you, but I want the car washed and ready to go in thirty minutes. Can you send up a duplicate stub?...What . . . Oh?...Well, that’s fine.” He hung up and reached for the hash pipe. “No problem,” hesaid. “That man remembers my face."

"That's good," I said. "They'll probably have a big net for us when we show up."shook his head. "As your attorney, I advise you not to about me." The TV news was about the Laos Invasion—a series of horrifying disasters: explosions and twisted wreckage, men fleeing in terror, Pentagon generals babbling insane lies. "Turn that shit off!" screamed my attorney "Let's get out of here!" A wise move. Moments after we picked up the car my attorney went into a drug coma and ran a red light on Main Street before I could bring us under control. I propped him up in the passenger seat and took the wheel myself...feeling fine, extremely sharp. All around me in traffic I could see people talking and I wanted to hear what they were saying. All of them. But the shotgun mike was in the trunk and I decided to leave it there. Las Vegas is not the kind of town where you want to drive down Main Street aiming a black bazooka—looking instrument at people.Turn up the radio. Turn up the tape machine. Look into the sunset up ahead. Roll the windows down for a better taste of the cool desert wind. Ah yes. This is what it's all about. Total control now. Tooling along the main drag on a Saturday night in Las Vegas, two good old boys in a fireapple—red convertible...stoned, ripped, twisted...Good People.

Great God! What is this terrible music?

"The Battle Hymn of Lieutenant Galley":

"...as we go marching on When I reach my final campground, in that land beyond the sun, and the Great Commander asks me..." (What did he ask you, Rusty?) "Did you fight or did you run?" (and what did you tell him, Rusty?) "...We responded to their rifle fire with everything we had..."

No! I can't be hearing this! It must be the drug. I glanced over at my attorney, but he was staring up at the sky, and I could see that his brain had gone off to that campground beyond the sun. Thank christ he can't hear this music, I thought. It would drive him into a racist frenzy.

Mercifully, the song ended. But my mood was already shattered...and now the fiendish cactus juice took over, plunging me into a sub—human funk as we suddenly came up on the turnoff to the Mint Gun Club. "One mile," the sign said. But even a mile away I could hear the crackling scream of two—stroke bike engines winding out...and then, coming closer, I heard another sound.

Shotguns! No mistaking that fiat hollow boom.

I stopped the car. What the hell is going on down there? I rolled up all the windows and eased down the gravel road, hunched low on the

wheel...until I saw about a dozen figures pointing shotguns into the air, firing at regular intervals.

Standing on a slab of concrete out here in the mesquite—desert, this scraggly little oasis in a wasteland north of Vegas . . They were clustered, with their shotguns, about fifty yards away from a one—story concrete/block—house, half - shaded by ten or twelve trees and surrounded by cop—cars, bike—trailers and motorcycles.

Of course. The Mint Gun Club! These lunatics weren't letting anything interfere with their target practice. Here were about a hundred bikers, mechanics and assorted motorsport types milling around in the pit area, signing in for tomorrow's race, idly sipping beers and appraising each other's machinery—and right in the middle of all this, oblivious to everything but the clay pigeons flipping out of the traps every five seconds or so, the shotgun people never missed a beat.

Well, why not? I thought. The shooting provided a certain rhythm—sort of a steady bass—line—to the high—pitched chaos of the bike scene. I parked the car and wandered into the crowd, leaving my attorney in his coma.

I bought a beer and watched the bikes checking in. Many Husquavarnas, high—tuned Swedish fireballs...also Yamahas, Kawasakis, a few 500 Triumphs, Maicos, & there a CZ, a Pursang...all very fast, super—light dfrt bikes. No Hogs in this league, not even a Sportster...that would be like entering our Great Red Shark in the dune buggy competition.

Maybe I should do that, I thought. Sign my attorney up as the driver, then send him out to the starting line with a head full of ether and acid. How would they handle it?Nobody would dare go out on the track with a person that crazy. He would roll on the first turn, and take out four or five dune buggies—a Kamikaze trip.

"What's the entry fee?" I asked the desk—man.

"Two fifty," he said.

"What if I told you I had a Vincent Black Shadow?"He stared up at me, saying nothing, not friendly. I noticed he was wearing a .38 revolver on his belt. "Forget it," I said. "My driver's sick, anyway." His eyes narrowed. "Your driver ain't the only one sick around here, buddy."

"He has a bone in his throat," I said.

"What?" The man was getting ugly, but suddenly his eyes switched away. He was staring at something else My attorney no longer wearing his

Danish sunglasses, no longer wearing his Acapulco shirt...a very crazy looking ,half—naked and breathing heavily.

“What’s the trouble here?” he croaked. “This man is my client—Are you prepared to go to court?” grabbed his shoulder and gently spun him around. “Never “ I said. “It’s the Black Shadow—they won’t accept it."

“Wait a minute!” he shouted. “What do you mean, they won’t accept it? Have you made a deal with these pigs?"

“Certainly not,” I said, pushing him along toward the gate. “But you notice they’re all armed. We’re the only people here without guns. Can’t you hear that shooting over there?” He paused, listened for an instant, then suddenly began,running toward the car. “You cocksuckers!” he screamed over his shoulder. “We’ll be back!” By the time we got the shark back on the highway he was able to talk. “Jesus christ! How did we get mixed up with that gang of psychotic bigots? Let’s get the fuck out of this town. Those scumbags were trying to kill us!

5.Covering the Story...A Glimpse of the Press in Action...Ugliness & Failure

The racers were ready at dawn. Fine sunrise over the desert. Very tense. But the race didn’t start until nine, so we had to kill about three long hours in the casino next to the pits, and that’s where the trouble started.

The bar opened at seven. There was also a “koffee & donut canteen” in the bunker, but those of us who had been up all night in places like the Circus—Circus were in no mood for coffee & donuts. We wanted strong drink. Our tempers were ugly and there were at least two hundred of us, so they opened the bar early. By eight—thirty there were big crowds around the crap—tables. The place was full of noise and drunken shouting.

A boney, middle—aged hoodlum wearing a Harley—Davidson T—shirt boomed up to the bar and yelled: “God damn! What day is this—Saturday?"

“More like Sunday,” somebody replied.

“Hah! That’s a bitch, ain’t it?” the H—D boomer shouted to nobody in particular. “Last night I was out home in Long and somebody said they were runnin’ the Mint 400 so I says to my old lady, ‘Man, I’m goin’.” He laughed.

“So she gives me a lot of crap about it, you know...so I started slappin’ her around and the next thing I knew two guys I never even seen before got me out on the sidewalk workin’ me over. Jesus! They beat me stupid.” He laughed again, talking into the crowd and not seeming listened. “Hell yes!”

he continued. “Then one of em says, ‘Where you going?’ And I says, ‘Las Vegas, to the Mint 400.’ So they gave me ten bucks and drove me down to the bus station....“ He paused. “At least I think it was them..."

“Well, anyway, here I am. And I tell you that was one hell of a long night, man! Seven hours on that goddamn bus! But when I woke up it was dawn and here I was in downtown Vegas and for a minute I didn’t know what the hell I was doin’ here. All I could think was, ‘0 Jesus, here we go again: Who’s divorced me this time?’” He accepted a cigarette from somebody in the crowd, still grinning as he lit up. “But then I remembered, by God! I was here for the Mint 400...and, man, that’s all I needed to know. I tell you it’s wonderful to be here, man. I don’t give a damn who wins or loses. It’s just wonderful to be here with you people.

Nobody argued with him. We all understood. In some circles, the “Mint 400” is a far, far better thing than the Super Bowl, the Kentucky Derby and the Lower Oakland Roller Derby Finals all rolled into one. This race attracts a very special breed, and our man in the Harley T—shirt was clearly one of them.

The correspondent from Life nodded sympathetically and screamed at the bartender: “Senzaman wazzyneeds!"

“Fast up with it,” I croaked. “Why not five?” I smacked the bar with my open, bleeding palm. “Hell yes! Bring us ten!"

“I’ll back it!” The Life man screamed. He was losing his grip on the bar, sinking slowly to his knees, but still speaking with definite authority: “This is a magic moment in sport! It may never come again!” Then his voice seemed to break. “I once did the Triple Crown,” he muttered. “But it was nothing like this.” The frog—eyed woman clawed feverishly at his belt. “Stand up!” she pleaded. “Please stand up! You’d be a very handsome man if you’d just stand up!” He laughed distractedly. “Listen, madam,” he snapped. “I’m damn near intolerably handsome down here where I am. You’d go crazy if I stood up!” The woman kept pulling at him. She’d been mooning at his elbows for two hours, and now she was making her move. The man from Life wanted no part of it; he slumped deeper into his crouch.

I turned away. It was too horrible. We were, after all, the absolute cream of the national sporting press. And we were gathered here in Las Vegas for a very special assignment: to cover the Fourth Annual “Mint 400”...and when it comes to things like this, you don’t fool around.

But now—even before the spectacle got under way—there were signs that we might be losing control of the situation. Here we were on this fine Nevada morning, this cool bright dawn on the desert, hunkered down at some greasy bar in a concrete blockhouse & gambling casino called the "Mint Gun Club" about ten miles out of Vegas...and with the race about to start, we were dangerously disorganized.

Outside, the lunatics were playing with their motorcycles, taping the headlights, topping off oil in the forks, last minute bolt—tightening (carburetor screws, manifold nuts, etc.) and the first ten bikes blasted off on the stroke of nine. It was extremely exciting and we all went outside to watch. The flag went down and these ten poor buggers popped their clutches and zoomed into the first turn, all together, then somebody grabbed the lead (a 405 Husquavarna, as I recall), and a cheer went up as the rider screwed it on and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"Well, that's that," somebody said. "They'll be back around in an hour or so. Let's go back to the bar." But not yet. No. There were something like a hundred and ninety more bikes waiting to start. They went off ten at a time, every two minutes. At first it was possible to watch them out to a distance of some two hundred yards from the starting line. But this visibility didn't last long. The third brace of ten disappeared into the dust about a hundred yards from where we stood...and by the time they'd sent off the first hundred (with still another hundred to go), our visibility was down to something like fifty feet. We could see as far as the hay—bales at the end of the pits...

Beyond that point the incredible dustcloud that would hang over this part of the desert for the next two days was already formed up solid. None of us realized, at the time, that this was the last we would see of the "Fabulous Mint 400"—By noon it was hard to see the pit area from the bar/casino, one hundred feet away in the blazing sun. The idea of trying to "cover this race" in any conventional press—sense was absurd: It was like trying to keep track of a swimming meet in an Olympic—sized pool filled with talcum powder instead of water. The Ford Motor Company had come through, as promised, with a "press Bronco" and a driver, but after a few savage runs across the desert—looking for motorcycles and occasionally finding one—I abandoned this vehicle to the photographers and went back to the bar.

It was time, I felt, for an Agonizing Reappraisal of the whole scene. The race was definitely under way. I had witnessed the start; I was sure of that much. But what now? Rent a helicopter? Get back in that stinking Bronco? Wander out on that goddamn desert and watch these fools race past the checkpoints? One every thirteen minutes... .

By ten they were spread out all over the course. It was no longer a “race”; now it was an Endurance Contest. The only visible action was at the start/finish line, where every few minutes some geek would come speeding out of the dustcloud and stagger off his bike, while his pit crew would gas it up and then launch it back onto the track with a fresh driver for another fifty—mile lap, another brutal hour of kidney killing madness out there in that terrible dust—blind limbo.

Somewhere around eleven, I made another tour in the press vehicle, but all we found were two dune—buggies full of what looked like retired petty—officers from San Diego. Theycut us off in a dry—wash and demanded, “Where is the damn thing?"

“Beats me,” I said. “We’re just good patriotic Americans like yourselves.” Both of their buggies were covered with ominous symbols: Screaming Eagles carrying American Flags in their claws, a slant—eyed snake being chopped to bits by a buzz—saw made of stars & stripes, and one of the vehicles had what looked like a machine—gun mount on the passenger side.

They were having a bang—up time—just crashing around the desert at top speed and hassling anybody they met. “What outfit you fellas with?” one of them shouted. The engines were all roaring; we could barely hear each other.“The sporting press,” I yelled. “We’re friendlies—hired geeks.” Dim smiles.

“If you want a good chase,” I shouted, “you should get after that skunk from CBS News up ahead in the big black jeep. He’s the man responsible for The Selling Of The Pentagon."

“Hot damn!” two of them screamed at once. “A black jeep, you say?” They roared off, and so did we. Bouncing across the rocks & scrub oak/cactus like iron tumbleweeds. The beer in my hand flew up and hit the top, then fell in my lap and soaked my crotch with warm foam.

“You’re fired,” I said to the driver. “Take me back to the pits.” It was time, I felt, to get grounded—to ponder this rotten assignment and figure out how to cope with it. Lacerda insisted on Total Coverage. He wanted to

goback out in the dust storm and keep trying for some rare combination of film and lense that might penetrate the aweful stuff.

“Joe,” our driver, was willing. His name was not really “Joe,” but that’s what we’d been instructed to call him. I had talked to the FOMOCO boss the night before, and when we mentioned the driver he was assigning to us he said, “His real name is Steve, but you should just call him Joe."

“Why not?” I said, We’ll call him anything he wants. How about “Zoom”?"

“No dice,” the FOrd man said, “It has to be “Joe”.

Lacerda agreed, and sometime around noon he went out on the desert again, in the company of our driver Joe. I went back to the blockhouse bar/casino that was actually the Mint Gun Club—where I began to drink heavily, think heavily, and make many heavy notes...

6. A Night on the Town...Confrontation at the Desert Inn...Drug Frenzy at the Circus Circus...

Saturday midnight...Memories of this night are extremely hazy. All I have, for guide—pegs, is a pocketful of keno cards and cocktail napkins, all covered with scribbled notes. Here is one: “Get the Ford man, demand a Bronco for race—observation purposes . .. photos?...Lacerda/call...why not a helicopter? ... Get on the phone, lean on the fuckers...heavy yelling.” Another says: “Sign on Paradise Boulevard—’Stopless and Topless’...bush—league sex compared to L.A.; pasties here—total naked public humping in L.A. . . . Las Vegas is a society of armed masturbators/gambling is the kicker here/sex is extra/weird trip for high rollers...house—whores for winners, hand jobs for the bad luck crowd.” A long time ago when I lived in Big Sur down the road from Lionel Olay I had a friend who liked to go to Reno for the crap—shooting. He owned a sporting—goods store in Carmel. And one month he drove his Mercedes highway—cruiser to Reno on three consecutive weekends—winning heavilyinch time. After three trips he was something like $15,000 ahead, so he decided to skip the fourth weekend and take friends to dinner at Nepenthe. “Always quit winners,” explained. “And besides, it’s a long drive.” On Monday morning he got a phone call from Reno—from the general manager of the casino he’d been working out on. “We missed you this weekend,” said the GM. “The pit—men were bored."

“Shucks,” said my friend.

So the next weekend he flew up to Reno in a private plane, with a friend and two girls—all “special guests” of the GM. Nothing too good for high rollers...

And on Monday morning the same plane—the casino’s plane—flew him back to the Monterey airport. The pilot lent him a dime to call a friend for a ride to Carmel. He was $30,000 in debt, and two months later he was looking down the barrel of one of the world’s heaviest collection agendes.

So he sold his store, but that didn’t make the nut. They could wait for the rest, he said—but then he got stomped, which convinced him that maybe he’d be better off borrowing enough money to pay the whole wad.

Mainline gambling is a very heavy business—and Las Vegas makes Reno seem like your friendly neighborhood grocery store. For a loser, Vegas is the meanest town on earth. Until about a year ago, there was a giant billboard on the outskirts of Las Vegas, saying:

DON’T GAMBLE WITH MARIJUANA! IN NEVADA: POSSESSION—20 YEARS SALE—LIFE!

So I was not entirely at ease drifting around the casinos on this Saturday night with a car full of marijuana and head full of acid. We had several narrow escapes: at one point I tried to drive the Great Red Shark into the laundry room of the Landmark Hotel—but the door was too narrow, and the people inside seemed dangerously excited.

We drove over to the Desert Inn, to catch the Debbie Reynolds/Harry James show. “I don’t know about you,” I told my attorney, “but in my line of business it’s important to be Hep."

“Mine too,” he said. “But as your attorney I advise you to drive over to the Tropicana and pick up on Guy Lombardo. He’s in the Blue Room with his Royal Canadians."

“Why?” I asked.

“Why what?"

“Why should I pay out my hard—earned dollars to watch a fucking corpse?"

“Look,” he said. “Why are we out here? To entertain ourselves, or to do the job?"

“The job, of course,” I replied. We were driving around in circles, weaving through the parking lot of a place I thought was the Dunes, but it turned out to be the Thunderbird or maybe it was the Hacienda My attorney was scanning The Vegas Visitor, looking for hints of action. “How about

“‘Nickel Nick’s Slot Arcade?’” he said. “‘Hot Slots,’ that sounds heavy . . . Twenty—nine cent hotdogs . .

Suddenly people were screaming at us. We were in trouble. Two thugs wearing red - gold military overcoats were looming over the hood: “What the hell are you doing?” one screamed. “You can’t park here!’ “Why not?” I said. It seemed like a reasonable place to park, plenty of space. I’d been looking for a parking spot for what seemed like a very long time. Too long. I was about ready to abandon the car and call a taxi...but then, yes, we found this space.

Which turned out to be the sidewalk in front of the main entrance to the Desert Inn. I had run over so many curbs by this time, that I hadn’t even noticed this last one. But now we ourselves in a position that was hard to explain...the entrance, thugs yelling at us, bad confusion.... attorney was out of the car in a flash, waving a five—dollar bill. “We want this car parked! I’m an old friend of Debbie’s. I used to romp with her.” For a moment I thought he had blown it...then one of the doormen reached out for the bill, saying: “OK, OK. I’ll take care of it, sir.” And he tore off a parking stub.

“Holy shit!” I said, as we hurried through the lobby. “They almost had us there. That was quick thinking."

“What do you expect?” he said. “I’m your attorney...and you owe me five bucks. I want it now.” I shrugged and gave him a bill. This garish, deep—orlon carpeted lobby of the Desert Inn seemed an inappropriate place to be haggling about nickel/dime bribes for the parking lot attendant. This was Bob Hope’s turf. Frank Sinatra’s. Spiro Agnew’s. The lobby fairly reeked of high—grade formica and plastic palm trees - it was clearly a high—class refuge for Big Spenders.

We approached the grand ballroom full of confidence, but they refused to let us in. We were too late, said a man in a wine—colored tuxedo; the house was already full—no seats left, at any price.

“Fuck seats,” said my attorney. “We’re old friends of Debbie’s. We drove all the way from L.A. for this show, and we’re goddamn well going in.” The tux—man began jabbering about “fire regulations,” but my attorney refused to listen. Finally, after a lot of bad noise, he let us in for nothing—provided we would stand quietly in back and not smoke.

We promised, but the moment we got inside we lost control. The tension had been too great. Debbie Reynolds was yukking across the stage in a

silver Afro wig . . . to the tune of “Sergeant Pepper,” from the golden trumpet of Harry James.

“Jesus creeping shit!” said my attorney. “We’ve wandered into a time capsule!” Heavy hands grabbed our shoulders. I jammed the hash pipe back into my pocket just in time. We were dragged across the lobby and held against the front door by goons until our car was fetched up. “OK, get lost,” said the wine—tux—man. “We’re giving you a break. If Debbie has friendsIke you guys, she’s in worse trouble than I thought."

“We’ll see about this!” my attorney shouted as we drove away. “You paranoid scum!” I drove around to the Circus—Circus Casino and parked near the back door. “This is the place,” I said. “They’ll never fuck with us here."

“Where’s the ether?” said my attorney. “This mescaline isn’t working.” I gave him the key to the trunk while I lit up the hash pipe. He came back with the ether—bottle, un—capped it, then poured some into a kleenex and mashed it under his nose, breathing heavily. I soaked another kleenex and fouled my own nose. The smell was overwhelming, even with the top down. Soon we were staggering up the stairs towards the entrance, laughing stupidly and dragging each other along, like drunks.

This is the main advantage of ether: it makes you behave like the village drunkard in some early Irish novel...total loss of all basic motor skills: blurred vision, no balance, numb tongue—severance of all connection between the body and the brain. Which is interesting, because the brain continues to function more or less normally...you can actually watch yourself behaving in this terrible way, but you can’t controlit.

You approach the turnstiles leading into the Circus—Circus and you know that when you get there, you have to give the man two dollars or he won’t let you inside...but when you get there, everything goes wrong: you misjudge the distance to the turnstile and slam against it, bounce off and grab hold of an old woman to keep from falling, some angry Rotarian shoves you and you think: What’s happening here? What’s going on? Then you hear yourself mumbling: “Dogs fucked the Pope, no fault of mine. Watch out!...Why money? My name is Brinks; I was born...born? Get sheep over side...women and children to armored car...orders from Captain Zeep.” Ah, devil ether—a total body drug. The mind recoils in horror, unable to communicate with the spinal column. The hands flap crazily, unable to get

money out of the pocket...garbled laughter and hissing from the mouth...always smiling.

Ether is the perfect drug for Las Vegas. In this town they love a drunk. Fresh meat. So they put us through the turnstiles and turned us loose inside.

The Circus—Circus is what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war. This is the Sixth Reich. The ground floor is full of gambling tables, like all the other casinos...but the place is about four stories high, in the style of a circus tent, and all manner of strange County—Fair/Polish Carnival madness is going on up in this space. Right above the gambling tables the Forty Flying Carazito Brothers are doing a high—wire trapeze act, along with four muzzled Wolverines and the Six Nymphet Sisters from San Diego...so you're down on the main floor playing blackjack, and the stakes are getting high when suddenly you chance to look up, and there, right smack above your head is a half—naked fourteen—year—old girl being chased through the air by a snarling wolverine, which is suddenly locked in a death battle with two silver—painted Polacks who come swinging down from opposite balconies and meet in mid—air on the wolverine's neck...both Polacks seize the animal as they fall straight down towards the crap tables—but they bounce off the net; they separate and spring back up towards the roof in three different directions, and just as they're about to fall again they are grabbed out of the air by three Korean Kittens and trapezed off to one of the balconies.

This madness goes on and on, but nobody seems to notice. The gambling action runs twenty—four hours a day on the main floor, and the circus never ends. Meanwhile, on all the upstairs balconies, the customers are being hustled by every conceivable kind of bizarre shuck. All kinds of funhouse—typeShoot the pasties off the nipples of a ten—foot bulle and win a cotton—candy goat. Stand in front of this fantastic machine, my friend, and for just 99$ your likeness will appear, two hundred feet tall, on a screen above downtown Las Vegas. Ninety—nine cents more for a voice message. "Say whatever you want, fella. They'll hear you, don't worry about that. Remember you'll be two hundred feet tall." Jesus Christ. I could see myself lying in bed in the Mint Hotel, half—asleep and staring idly out the window, when suddenly a vicious nazi drunkard appears two hundred feet tall in the midnight sky, screaming gibberish at the world: "Woodstock Uber Alles!" We will close the drapes tonight. A thing like that could send a drug person careening around the room like a pingpong ball. Hallucinations

are bad enough. But after a while you learn to cope with things like seeing your dead grandmother crawling up your leg with a knife in her teeth. Most acid fanciers can handle this sort of thing.But nobody can handle that other trip—the possibility that any freak with $1.98 can walk into the Circus—Circus and suddenly appear in the sky over downtown Las Vegas twelve times the size of God, howling anything that comes into his head. No, this is not a good town for psychedelic drugs. Reality itself is too twisted.

Good mescaline comes on slow. The first hour is all waiting, then about halfway through the second hour you start cursing the creep who burned you, because nothing is happeningand then ZANG! Fiendish intensity, strange glow and vibrations...a very heavy gig in a place like the Circus—Circiii.

“I hate to say this,” said my attorney as we sat down at the Merry—Go—Round Bar on the second balcony, “but this place is getting to me. I think I’m getting the Fear."

“Nonsense,” I said. “We came out here to find the American Dream, and now that we’re right in the vortex you want to quit.” I grabbed his bicep and squeezed. “You must realize,”I said, “that we’ve found the main nerve."

“I know,” he said. “That’s what gives me the Fear.” The ether was wearing off, the acid was long gone, but the mescaline was running strong. We were sitting at a small round gold formica table, moving in orbit around the bartender.

“Look over there,” I said. “Two women fucking a polar bear."

“Please,” he said. “Don’t tcll me those things. Not now.” He signaled the waitress for two more Wild Turkeys. “This is my last drink,” he said. “How much money can you lend me?"

“Not much,” I said. “Why?"

“I have to go,” he said.

“Go?"

“Yes. Leave the country. Tonight."

“Calm down,” I said. “You’ll be straight in a few hours."

“No,” he said. “This is serious.

“George Metesky was serious,” I said. “And you see what they did to him."

“Don’t fuck around!” he shouted. “One more hour in this town and I’ll kill somebody!” I could see he was on the edge. That fearful intensity that

comes at the peak of a mescaline seizure. “OK,” I said. “I’ll lend you some money. Let’s go outside and see how much we have left."

“Can we make it?” he said.

“Well...that depends on how many people we fuck with between here and the door. You want to leave quietly?"

“I want to leave fast,” he said.

“OK. Let’s pay this bill and get up very slowly. We’re both out of our heads. This is going to be a long walk.” I shouted at the waitress for a bill. She came over, looking bored, and my attorney stood up.

“Do they pay you to screw that bear?” he asked her.

“What?"

“He’s just kidding,” I said, stepping between them. “Come on, Doc—let’s go downstairs and gamble.” I got him as far as the edge of the bar, the rim of the merry—go—round, but he refused to get off until it stopped turning.

“It won’t stop,” I said. “It’s not never going to stop.” I stepped off and turned around to wait for him, but he wouldn’t move...and before I could reach out and pull him off, he was carried away. “Don’t move,” I shouted. “You’ll come around!” His eyes were staring blindly ahead, squinting with fear and confusion. But he didn’t move a muscle until he’d made the whole circle.

I waited until he was almost in front of me, then I reached out to grab him—but he jumped back and went around the circle again. This made me very nervous. I felt on the verge of a freakout. The bartender seemed to be watching us.Carson City, I thought. Twenty years.

I stepped on the merry—go—round and hurried around the bar, approaching my attorney on his blind side—and when we came to the right spot I pushed him off. He staggered into the aisle and uttered a hellish scream as he lost his balance and went down, thrashing into the crowd...rolling like a log, then up again in a flash, fists clenched, looking for somebody to hit.

I approached him with my hands in the air, trying to smile. “You fell,” I said. “Let’s go.” By this time people were watching us. But the fool wouldn’t move, and I knew what would happen if I grabbed him. “OK,” I said. “You stay here and go to jail. I’m leaving.” I started walking fast towards the stairs, ignoring him.

This moved him.

“Did you see that?” he said as he caught up with me. “Some sonofabitch kicked me in the back!”

“Probably the bartender,” I said. “He wanted to stomp you for what you said to the waitress."

“Good god! Let’s get out of here. Where’s the elevator?"

“Don’t go near that elevator,” I said. “That’s just what they want us to do . . . trap us in a steel box and take us down to the basement.” I looked over my shoulder, but nobody was following.

“Don’t run,” I said. “They’d like an excuse to shoot us.” He nodded, seeming to understand. We walked fast along the big indoor midway—shooting galleries, tattoo parlors, money—changers and cotton—candy booths—then out through a bank of glass doors and across the grass downhill to a parking lot where the Red Shark waited.

‘You drive,” he said. “I think there’s something wrong with me.”

7. Paranoid Terror...and the Aweful Specter of Sodomy...A Flashing of Knives and Green Water

When we got to the Mint I parked on the street in front of the casino, around a corner from the parking lot. No point risking a scene in the lobby, I thought. Neither one of us could pass for drunk. We were both hyper—tense. Extremely menacing vibrations all around us. We hurried through the casino and up the rear escalator.

We made it to the room without meeting anybody—but the key wouldn’t open the door. My attorney was struggling desperately with it. “Those bastards have changed the lock on us,” he groaned. “They probably searched the room. Jesus, we’re finished.” Suddenly the door swung open. We hesitated, then hurried inside. No sign of trouble. “Bolt everything,” said my attorney. “Use all chains.” He was staring at two Mint Hotel Room keys in his hand. “Where did this one come from?” he said, holding up a key with number 1221 on it.

“That’s Lacerda’s room,” I said.

He smiled. “Yeah, that’s right. I thought we might need it."

“What for?"

“Let’s go up there and blast him out of bed with the fire he said.

“No,” I said. “We should leave the poor bastard alone, I get the feeling he’s avoiding us for some reason."

“Don’t kid yourself,” he said. “That Portuguese son of bitch is dangerous. He’s watching us like a hawk.” He squinted at me. “Have you

made a deal with him?"

“I talked with him on the phone,” I said, “while you were out getting the car washed. He said he was turning in early, so he can get out there to the starting line at dawn.” My attorney was not listening. He utt.ered an anguished cry and smacked the wall with both hands. “That dirty bastard!” he shouted. “I knew it! He got hold of my woman!” I laughed. “That little blonde groupie with the film crew? You think he sodomized her?"

“That’s right—laugh about it!” he yelled. “You goddamn honkies are all the same.” By this time he’d opened a new bottle of tequila and was quaffing it down. Then he grabbed a grapefruit and sliced it in half with a Gerber Mini—Magnum—a stainless—steel hunting knife with a blade like a fresh—honed straight razor.

“Where’d you get that knife?” I asked.

“Room service sent it up,” he said. “I wanted something to cut the limes.

“What limes?"

“They didn’t have any,” he said. “They don’t grow out here in the desert.” He sliced the grapefruit into quarters then into eighths...then sixteenths . . . then he began aimlessly at the residue. “That dirty toad bastard,” he moaned. “I knew I should have taken him out when I had the chance. Now he has her.” I remembered the girl. We’d had a problem with her on the elevator a few hours earlier: my attorney had made a fool of himself.

“You must be a rider,” she’d said. “What class are you in?"

“Class?” he snapped. “What the fuck do you mean?"

“What do you ride?” she asked with a quick smile. “We’re filming the race for a TV series—maybe we can use you."

“Use me?” Mother of God, I thought. Here it comes. The elevator was crowded with race people: it was taking a long time to get from floor to floor. By the time we’d stopped at Three, he was trembling badly. Five more to go. .

“I ride the big ones!” he shouted suddenly. “The really big fuckers!” I laughed, trying to de—fuse the scene. “The Vincent Black Shadow,” I said. “We’re with the factory team.” This brought a murmur of rude dissent from the crowd. “Bullshit,” somebody behind me muttered.

“Wait a minute!” my attorney shouted...and then to the girl: “Pardon me, lady, but I think there’s some kind of ignorant chicken—sucker in this

car who needs his face cut open.” He plunged his hand into the pocket of his black plastic jacket and turned to face the people crowded into the rear of the elevator. “You cheap honky faggots,” he snarled. “Which one of you wants to get cut?” I was watching the overhead floor—indicator. The door opened at Seven, but nobody moved. Dead silence. The door closed. Up to Eight...then open again. Still no sound ormovement in the crowded car. Just as the door began to close I stepped off and grabbed his arm, jerking him out just in time. The doors slid shut and the elevator light dinged Nine. “Quick! Into the room,” I said. “Those bastards will have on us!” We ran around the corner to the room. My attorney was laughing wildly. “Spooked!” he shouted. “Did you see that? They were spooked. Like rats in a death—cage!” Then, as we bolted the door behind us, he stopped laughing. “God damn,” he said. “It’s serious now. That girl understood. She fell in love with me.”

Now, many hours later, he was convinced that Lacerda—the so—called photographer—had somehow got his hands on the girl. “Let’s go up there and castrate that fucker,” he said, waving his new knife around in quick circles in front of his teeth. “Did you put him onto her?"

“Look,” I said, “you’d better put that goddamn blade away and get your head straight. I have to put the car in the lot.” I was backing slowly towards the door. One of the things you learn, after years of dealing with drug people, is that everything is serious. You can turn your back on a person, but never turn your back on a drug—especially when it’s waving a razor—sharp hunting knife in your eyes.

“Take a shower,” I said. “I’ll be back in twenty minutes.” I left quickly, locking the door behind me and taking the key to Lacerda’s room—the one my attorney had stolen earlier. That poor geek, I thought, as I hurried down the escalator. They sent him out here on this perfectly reasonable assignment—just a few photos of motorcycles and dune buggies racing around the desert—and now he was plunged, without realizing it, into the maw of some world beyond his ken. There was no way he could possibly understand what was happening.

What were we doing out here? What was the meaning of this trip? Did I actually have a big red convertible out there on the street? Was I just roaming around these Mint Hotel escalators in a drug frenzy of some kind, or had I really come out here to Las Vegas to work on a story?

I reached in my pocket for the room key; “1850,” it said. At least that much was real. So my immediate task was to deal with the car and get back to that room . . . and then hopefully get straight enough to cope with whatever might happen at dawn.

Now off the escalator and into the casino, big crowds still tight around the crap tables. Who are these people? These faces! Where do they come from? They look like caricatures of used—car dealers from Dallas. But they’re real. And, sweet Jesus, there are a hell of a lot of them—still screaming around these desert—city crap tables at four—thirty on a Sunday morning. Still humping the American Dream, that vision of the Big Winner somehow emerging from the last - minute pre—dawn chaos of a stale Vegas casino.

Big strike in Silver City. Beat the dealer and go home rich. Why not? I stopped at the Money Wheel and dropped a dollar on Thomas Jefferson—a $2 bill, the straight Freak ticket, thinking as always that some idle instinct bet might carry the whole thing off.

But no. Just another two bucks down the tube. You bastards!

No. Calm down. Learn to enjoy losing. The important thing is to cover this story on its own terms; leave the other stuff to Life and Look—at least for now. On the way down the escalator I saw the Life man twisted feverishly into the telegraph booth, chanting his wisdom into the ear of some horny robot in a cubicle on that other coast. Indeed: “LAS VEGAS AT DAWN—The racers are still asleep, the dust is still on the desert, $50,000 in prize money slumbers darkly in the office safe at Del Webb’s fabulous Mint Hotel in the bright heart of Casino Center. Extreme tension. And our Life team is here (as always, with a sturdy police escort...).“ Pause. “Yes, operator, that word was police. What else? This is, after all, a Life Special...

The Red Shark was out on Fremont where I’d left it. I drove around to the garage and checked it in—Dr. Gonzo’s car, no problem, and if any of your men fall idle we can use awax job before morning. Yes, of course—just bill the room.

• • •

My attorney was in the bathtub when I returned. Submerged in green water—the oily product of some Japanese bath salts he’d picked up in the hotel gift shop, along with a new AM/FM radio plugged into the electric razor socket. Top volume. Some gibberish by a thing called “Three Dog

Night," about a frog named Jeremiah who wanted "Joy to the World."First Lennon, now this, I thought. Next we'll have Glenn Campbell screaming "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" Where indeed? No flowers in this town. Only carnivorous plants. I turned the volume down and noticed a hunk of chewed—up white paper beside the radio. My attorney seemed not to notice the sound—change. He was lost in a fog of green steam; only half his head was visible above the water line.

"You ate this?" I asked, holding up the white pad.

He ignored me. But I knew. He would be very difficult to reach for the next six hours. The whole blotter was chewed up.

"You evil son of a bitch," I said. "You better hope there's some thorazine in that bag, because if there's not you're in bad trouble tomorrow."

"Music!" he snarled. "Turn it up. Put that tape on."

"What tape?"

"The new one. It's right there." I picked up the radio and noticed that it was also a tape recorder—one of those things with a cassette—unit built in. And the tape, Surrealistic Pillow, needed only to be flipped over. He had already gone through side one—at a volume that must have been audible in every room within a radius of one hundred yards, walls and all.

"'White Rabbit,"' he said. "I want a rising sound."

"You're doomed," I said. "I'm leaving here in two hours—and then they're going to come up here and beat the mortal shit out of you with big saps. Right there in the tub."

"I dig my own graves," he said. "Green water and the White Rabbit...put it on; don't make me use this." His arm lashed out of the water, the hunting knife gripped in his fist.

"Jesus," I muttered. And at that point I figured he was I help—lying there in the tub with a head full of acidand the sharpest knife I've ever seen, totally incapable of reason, demanding the White Rabbit. This is it, I thought. "I've gone as far as I can with this waterhead. This time it's a suicide trip. This time he wants it. He's ready..

"OK," I said, turning the tape over and pushing the "play" button. "But do me one last favor, will you? Can you give me two hours? That's all I ask—just two hours to sleep before tomorrow. I suspect it's going to be a very difficult day."

“Of course,” he said. “I’m your attorney. I’ll give you all the time you need, at my normal rates: $45 an hour—but you’ll be wanting a cushion, so why don’t you just lay one of those $100 bills down there beside the radio, and fuck off?"

“How about a check?” I said. “On the Sawtooth National Bank. You won’t need any ID to cash it there. They know me."

“Whatever’s right,” he said, beginning to jerk with the music. The bathroom was like the inside of a huge defective woofer. Heinous vibrations, overwhelming sound. The floor was full of water. I moved the radio as far from the tub as it would go, then I left and closed the door behind me.

Within seconds he was shouting at me. “Help! You bastard! Ineed help!” I rushed back inside, thinking he’d sliced off an ear by accident.

But no...he was reaching across the bathroom toward the white formica shelf where the radio sat. “I want that tuckin radio,” he snarled.

I grabbed it away from his hand. “You fool!” I said. “Get in that tub! Get away from that goddamn radio!” I shoved it back from his hand. The volume was so far up that it was hard to know what was playing unless you knew Surrealistic Pillow almost note for note...which I did, at the time, so I knew that “White Rabbit” had finished; the peak and had come and gone.

But my attorney, it seemed, had not made it. He wanted more. “Back the tape up!” he yelled. “I need it again!” His eyes were full of craziness now, unable to focus. He seemed on the verge of some awful psychic orgasm “Let it roll!” he screamed. “Just as high as the fucker can go! And when it comes to that fantastic note where the rabbit bites its own head off, I want you to throw that fuckin radio into the tub with me.” I stared at him, keeping a firm grip on the radio. “Not me,” I said finally. “I’d be happy to ram a goddamn 440—volt cattle prod into that tub with you right now, but not this radio. It would blast you right through the wall—stone - dead in ten seconds.” I laughed. “Shit, they’d make me explain it—drag me down to some rotten coroner’s inquest and grill me about. . yes...the exact details. I don’t need that."

“Bullshit!” he screamed. “Just tell them I wanted to get Higher!” I thought for a moment. “Okay,” I said finally. “You’re right. This is probably the only solution.” I picked up the tape/radio—which was still plugged in—and held it over the tub. “Just let me make sure I have it all lined up,” I said. “You want me to throw this thing into the tub when ‘White Rabbit’ peaks—

is that it?” He fell back in the water and smiled gratefully. “Fuck yes,” he said. “I was beginnjng to think I was going to have to go out and get one of the goddamn maids to do it."

“Don’t worry,” I said. “Are you ready?” I hit the “play” button and “White Rabbit” started building again. Almost immediately he began to howl and moan...another fast run up that mountain, and thinking, this time, that he would finally get over the top. His eyes were gripped shut and only his head and both kneecaps poked up through the oily green water.

I let the song build while I sorted through the pile of fat ripe grapefruit next to the basin. The biggest one of the lot weighed almost two pounds. I got a good Vida Blue faitball grip on the fucker—and just as “Whit. Rabbit” peaked Ilashed it into the tub like a cannonball.

My attorney screamed crazily, thrashing around in the tub like a shark after meat, churning water all over the floor as he struggled to get hold of something.

I jerked the AC cord out of the tape/radio and moved out of the bathroom very quickly...the machine kept on playing, but now it was back on its own harmless battery power. I could hear the beat cooling down as I moved across the room to my kitbag and fetched up the Mace can...just as my attorney ripped the bathroom door open and started out. His eyes were still unfocused, but he was waving the blade out in front of him like a man who meant to cut something.

“Mace!” I shouted. “You want this?” I waved the Mace bomb in front of his watery eyes.

He stopped, “You bastard!” he hissed. “You’d do that, wouldn’t you?” I laughed, still waving the bomb at him. “Why worry? You’ll like it. Shit, there’s nothing in the world like a Mace high—forty—five minutes on your knees with the dry heaves, gasping for breath. It’ll calm you right down.” He stared in my general direction, trying to focus. “You cheap honky sonofabitch,” he muttered. “You’d do it, wouldn’t you?"

“Why not?” I said. “Hell, just a minute ago you were asking me to kilt you! And now you want to kill me! What I should do, goddamn it, is call the police!” He sagged. “The cops?” I nodded. “Yeah, there’s no choice. I wouldn’t dare go to sleep with you wandering around in this condition—with a head full of acid and wanting to slice me up with that god—damn knife.” He rolled his eyes for a moment, then tried to smile. “Who said anything about slicing you up?” he mumbled. I just wanted to carve a little

Z on your forehead—nothing serious.” He shrugged and reached for a cigarette of the TV set, I menaced him again with the Mace can. “Get back in that tub,” I said. “Eat some reds and try to calm down. Smoke some grass, shoot some smack—shit, dowhatever you have to do, but let me get some rest.” He shrugged and smiled distractedly, as if everything I'd said made perfect sense.

“Hell yes,” he said very earnestly. “You really need some sleep. You have towork tomorrow.” He shook his head sadly and turned back toward the bathroom. “God damn! What a bummer.” He waved me off. “Try to rest,” he said.“Don't let me keep you up.” I nodded, and watched him shuffle back into the bathroom—still holding the blade, but now he seemed unaware of it. The acid had shifted gears on him; the next phase would probably be one of those hellishly intense introspection night mares. Four hours or so of catatonic despair; but nothing physical, nothing dangerous. I watched the door close behind him, then I quietly slid a heavy, sharp—angled chair up in front of the bathroom knob and put the Mace can beside the alarm clock.

The room was very quiet. I walked over to the TV set and turned it on to a dead channel—white noise at maximum decibels, a fine sound for sleeping, a powerful continuous hiss to drown out everything strange.

8. “Genius 'Round the Wand Stands Hand in Hand, and One Shock of Recognition Runs the Whole Circle 'Round” - Art LinkIetter

I live in a quiet place, where any sound at night means some thing is about to happen: You come awake fast—thinking, what does that mean?

Usually nothing. But sometimes...it's hard to adjust to a city gig where the night is full of sounds, all of them comfortably routine. Cars, horns, footsteps ... no way to relax; so drown it all out with the fine white drone of a cross - eyed TV set. Jam the bugger between channels and doze off nicely.

Ignore that nightmare in the bathroom. Just another ugly refugee from the Love Generation, some doom—struck gimp who couldn't handle the pressure. My attorney has never been able to accept the notion—often espoused by reformed drug abusers and especially popular among those on probation—that you can get a lot higher without drugs than with them.

And neither have I, for that matter. But I once lived down the hill from Dr.—on -Road, Names deleted at insistence of publisher’s lawyer) a former acid guru who later claimed to have made that long jump from chemical frenzy to preternatural consciousness. One fine afternoon in the first rising

curl of what would soon become the Great San Francisco Acid Wave I stopped by the Good Doctor's house with the idea of asking him (since he was even then a known drug authority) what sort of advice he might have for a neighbor with a healthy curiosity about LSD.

I parked on the road and lumbered up his gravel driveway, pausing enroute to wave pleasantly at his wife, who was working out in the graden...pruning carrots, or whatever...humming while she works, some tune I fail to recognize.

Humming. Yes...but it would be nearly ten years before I would recognize that sound for what it was: like Ginsberg far gone in the Om,—was trying to humm me off. That was no old lady out there in that garden; it was the good doctor himself—and his humming was a frantic attempt to block me out of his higher consciousness.

I made several attempts to make myself clear: Just a neighbor come to call and ask the doctor's advice about gobbling some LSD in my shack just down the hill from his house. I did, after all, have weapons. And I liked to shoot them—especially at night, when the great blue flame would leap out, along with all that noise...and, yes, the bullets, too. We couldn't ignore that. Big balls of lead/alloy flying around the valley at speeds up to 3700 feet per second.

But I always fired into the nearest hill or, failing that, into blackness. I meant no harm; I just liked the explosions. And I was careful never to kill more than I could eat.

“Kill?” I realized I could never properly explain that word to this creature toiling here in its garden. Had it ever eaten meat? Could it conjugate the verb “hunt?” Did it understand hunger? Or grasp the awful fact that my income averaged around $32 a week that year?

No...no hope of communication in this place. I recognized thatbut not soon enough to keep the drug doctor from humming me all the way down his driveway and into my car and down the mountain road. Forget LSD, I thought. Look what it's done to that poor bastard.

So I stuck with hash and rum for another six months or so, until I moved into San Francisco and found myself one night, in a place called “The Fillmore Auditorium.” And that was that. One grey lump of sugar, and BOOM. In my mind I was right back there in the doctor’s garden. Not on the surface, but underneath - poking up through that finely cultivated earth like some kind of mutant mushroom. A victim of the Drug Explosion. A

natural street freak, just eating whatever came by. I recall one night, in the Matrix, when a road—person came in with a big pack on his back, shouting: “Anybody want some L...S...D...? I got all the makin’s right here. All I need is a place to cook.” The manager was on him at once, mumbling, “Cool it, cool it, come on back to the office.” I never saw him after that night, but before he was taken away, the road—person distributed his samples. Huge white spansules. I went into the men’s room to eat mine. But only half at first, I thought. Good thinking, but a hard thing to accomplish under the circumstances. I ate the first half, but spilled the rest on the sleeve of my red Pendleton shirt...And then, wondering what to do with it, I saw one of the musicians come in. “What’s the trouble,” he said.

“Well,” I said. “All this white stuff on my sleeve is LSD.” He said nothing: Merely grabbed my arm and began sucking on it. A very gross tableau. I wondered what would happen if some Kingston Trio/young stockbroker type might wander in and catch us in the act. Fuck him, I thought. With a bit of luck, it’ll ruin his life—forever thinking that just be—hind some narrow door in all his favorite bars, men in red Pendleton shirts are getting incredible kicks from things he’ll never know. Would he dare to suck a sleeve? Probably not. Play it safe. Pretend you never saw it.

Strange memories on this nervous night in Las Vegas. Five years later? Six? It seems like a lifetime, or at least a Main Era—the kind of peak that never comes again. San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of. Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run . . . but no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were here and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant....

History is hard to know, because of all the hired bullshit, but even without being sure of “history” it seems entirely reasonable to think that every now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash, for reasons that nobody really understands at the time—and which never explain, in retrospect, what actually happened.My central memory of that time seems to hang on one or five or maybe forty nights—or very early mornings—when I left the Fillmore half—crazy and, instead of going home, aimed the big 650 Lightning across the Bay Bridge at a hundred miles an hour wearing L. L. Bean shorts and a Butte sheepherder’s jacket...booming through the Treasure Island tunnel at the lights of Oakland and Berkeley and Richmond, not quite sure which turn—off to take when I

got to the other end (always stalling at the toll—gate, too twisted to find neutral while I fumbled for change)...but being absolutely certain that no matter which way I went I would come to a place where people were just as high and wild as I was: No doubt at all about that. .There was madness in any direction, at any hour. If not across the Bay, then up the Golden Gate or down 101 to Los Altos or La Honda....You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning.And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail. There was no point in fighting—on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave.

So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high—water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.

9. Sympathy for the Devil...Newsmen Tortured?...Flight into Madness

The decision to flee came suddenly. Or maybe not. Maybe I'd 'planned it all along—subconsciously waiting for the right moment. The bill was a factor, I think. Because I had no money to pay it. And no more of these devilish credit—card/reimbursement deals. Not after dealing with Sidney Zion. They seized my American Express card after that one, and now the bastards are suing me—along with the Diner's Club and the IRS....

And besides, the magazine is legally responsible. My attorney saw to that. We signed nothing. Except those room service tabs. We never knew the total, but—just before we left—my attorney figured we were running somewhere between $29 and $36 per hour, for forty—eight consecutive hours.

"Incredible," I said. "How could it happen?" But by the time I asked this question, there was nobody around to answer. My attorney was gone. He must have sensed trouble. On Monday evening he ordered up a set of fine cowhide luggage from room service, told me he had reservations on the next plane for L.A. We would have to hurry, he said, and on the way to the airport he borrowed $25 for the plane ticket.

I saw him off, then I went back to the airport souvenir counter and spent all the rest of my cash on garbage—complete shit, souvenirs of Las Vegas,

plastic fake—Zippo—lighters with a built—in roulette wheel for $6.95, JFK half—dollar clips for $5 each, tin apes that shook dice for $7.50...

I loaded up on this crap, then carried it out to the Great Red Shark and dumped it all in the back seat...and then I stepped into the driver's seat in a very dignified way (the white top was rolled back, as always) and I sat there and turned the radio on and began thinking.

How would Horatio Alger handle this situation?One toke over the line, sweet Jesus... one toke over the line. Panic. It crept up my spine like the first rising vibes of an acid frenzy. All these horrible realities began to dawn on me: Here I was all alone in Las Vegas with this goddamn incredibly expensive car, completely twisted on drugs, no attorney, no cash, no story for the magazine—and on top of everything else I had a gigantic goddamn hotel bill to deal with. We had ordered everything into that room that human hands could carry—including about six hundred bars of translucent Neutrogena soap.

The whole car was full of it—all over the floors, the seats, the glove compartment. My attorney had worked out some kind of arrangement with the mestizo maids on our floor to have this soap delivered to us—six hundred bars of this weird, transparent shit—and now it was all mine.

Along with this plastic briefcase that I suddenly noticed right beside me on the front seat. I lifted the fucker and knew immediately what was inside. No Samoan attorney in his right mind is going to stomp through the metal—detector gates of a commercial airline with a fat black .357 Magnum on his person.

So he had left it with me, for delivery—if I made it back to L.A. Otherwise . . . well, I could almost hear myself talking to the California Highway Patrol: What? This weapon? This loaded, unregistered, concealed and maybe hot .357 Magnum? What am I doing with it? Well, you see, officer, I pulled off the road near Mescal Springs—on the advice of my attorney, who subsequently disappearedr—and all of a sudden while I was just sort of walking around that deserted waterhole by myself for no reason at all when this little fella with a beard came up to me, out of nowhere, and he had horrible linoleum knife in one hand and this huge black pistol in the other hand... and he offered to carve a big X on my forehead, in memory of Lieutenant Calley...but when I told him I was a doctor of journalism his whole attitude changed. Yes, you probably won't believe this, officer, but he suddenly hurled that knife into the brackish mescal waters near our feet, and

then he gave me this revolver. Right, he just shoved it into my hands, butt—first, and then he ran off into the darkness.

So that's why I have this weapon, officer. Can you believe that?

No.

But I wasn't about to throw the bastard away, either. A good .357 is a hard thing to get, these days.

So I figured, well, just get this bugger back to Malibu, and it's mine. My risk - my gun: it made perfect sense. And if that Samoan pig wanted to argue, if he wanted to come yelling around the house, give him a taste of the bugger about midway up the femur. Indeed. 158 grains of half—jacketed lead/alloy, traveling 1500 feet per second, equals about forty pounds of Samoan hamburger, mixed up with bone splinters. Why not?

Madness, madness...and meanwhile all alone with the Great Red Shark in the parking lot of the Las Vegas airport. To hell with this panic. Get a grip. Maintain. For the next twenty—four hours this matter of personal control will be critical. Here I am sitting out here alone on this fucking desert, this nest of armed loonies, with a very dangerous carload hazards, horrors and liabilities that I must get back to L.A.if they nail me out here, I'm doomed. Completely fucked. No question about that. No future for a doctor of journalism editing the state pen weekly. Better to get the hell of this atavistic state at high speed. Right. But, first—to the Mint Hotel and cash a $50 check, then up to the room and call down for two club sandwiches, two quarts of milk, a pot of coffee and a fifth of Bacardi Anejo. Rum will be absolutely necessary to get through this night—to polish these notes, this shameful diary...keep the tape machine screaming all night long at top volume: "Allow me to introduce myself...I'm a man of wealth and taste." Sympathy?

Not for me. No mercy for a criminal freak in Las Vegas. This place is like the Army: the shark ethic prevails—eat the wounded. In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity.

It is a weird feeling to sit in a Las Vegas hotel at four in the morning—hunkered down with a notebook and a tape recorder in a $75—a—day suite and a fantastic room service bill, run up in forty—eight hours of total madness—knowing that just as soon as dawn comes up you are going to flee without paying a fucking penny...go stomping out through the lobby and call your red convertible down from the garage and stand there waiting

for it with a suitcase full of marijuana and illegal weapons...trying to look casual, scanning the first morning edition of the Las Vegas Sun.

This was the final step. I had taken all the grapefruit and other luggage out to the car a few hours earlier.

Now it was only a matter of slipping the noose: Yes, extremely casual behavior, wild eyes hidden behind these Saigon—mirror sun glasses...waiting for the Shark to roll up. Where is it? I gave that evil pimp of a carboy $5, a prime investment right now.

Stay calm, keep reading the paper. The lead story was a screaming blue headline across the top of the page:

TRIO RE—ARRESTED IN BEAUTY’S DEATH

An overdose of heroin was listed as the official cause of death for pretty Diane Hamby, 19, whose body was foundstuffed in a refrigerator last week, according to Clark County Coroner’s office. Investigators of the sheriff’s homicide team who went to arrest the suspects said that one, a 24—year—old woman, attempted to fling herself through the glass doors of her trailer before being stopped by deputies. Officers said she was apparently hysterical and shouted, ‘You’ll never take me alive.” But officers handcuffed the woman and she apparently was not injured.

GI DRUG DEATHS CLAIMED

WASHINGTON (AP)—A House Subcommittee report says illegal drugs killed 160 American GI’s last year—40 of them in Vietnam...Drugs were suspected, it said, in another 56 military deaths in Asia and the Pacific Command...It said the heroin problem in Vietnam is increasing in seriousness, primarily because of processing laboratories in Laos, Thailand and Hong Kong. “Drug suppression in Vietnam is almost completely ineffective,” the report said, “partially because of an ineffective local police force and partially because some presently unknown corrupt officials in public office are involved in the drug traffic.”

To the left of that grim notice was a four—column center—page photo of Washington, D.C., cops fighting with “young anti—war demonstrators who staged a sit—in and blocked the entrance to Selective Service Headquarters.”And next to the photo was a large black headline:

TORTURE TALES TOLD IN WAR HEARINGS.

WASHINGTON—Volunteer witnesses told an informal congressional panel yesterday that while serving as miliy interrogators they routinely used electrical tele—tione hookups and helicopter drops to torture and kill

ietnamese prisoners. One Army intelligence specialist iid the pistol slaying of his Chinese interpreter was de—by a superior who said, “She was just a slope, Lyway,” meaning she was an Asiatic....

Right underneath that story was a headline saying: FIVE WOUNDED NEAJi NYC TENEMENT...by an unidentified gunman who fired from the roof of a building, for no apparent reason. This item appeared just above a headline that said: PHARMACY OWNER ARRESTED IN PROBE...“a result,” the article explained, “of a preliminary investigation (of a Las Vegas pharmacy) showing a shortage of over 100,000 pills considered dangerous drugs...

Reading the front page made me feel a lot better. Against that heinous background, my crimes were pale and meaningless. I was a relatively respectable citizen—a multiple felon, perhaps, but certainly not dangerous. And when the Great Scorer came to write against my name, that would surely make a difference.

Or would it? I turned to the sports page and saw a small item about Muhammad Ali; his case was before the Supreme Court, the final appeal. He’d been sentenced to five years in prison for refusing to kill “slopes."

“I ain’t got nothin’ against them Viet Congs,” he said.

Five years.

10. Western Union Intervenes: A Warning from Mr. Heem...New Assignment from the Sports Desk and a Savage Invitation from the Police

Suddenly I felt guilty again. The Shark! Where was it? I tossed the paper aside and began to pace. Losing control. I felt my whole act slipping...and then I saw the car, swooping down a ramp in the next—door garage.

Deliverance! I grasped my leather satchel and moved forward to meet my wheels.

“MISTER DUKE!” The voice came from over my shoulder.

“Mister Duke! We’ve been looking for you!” I almost collapsed on the curb. Every cell in my brain and body sagged. No! I thought. I must be hallucinating. There’s nobody back there, nobody calling . . . it’s a paranoid delusion, amphetamine psychosis...just keep walking towards the car, always smiling....

“MISTER DUKE! Wait!” Well...why not? Many fine books have been written in on. And it’s not like I’ll be a total stranger up there in Carson City. The warden will recognize me; and the Con Boss—I once interviewed

them for The New York Times. Along with a lot of other cons, guards, cops and assorted hustlers who got ugly, by mail, when the article never appeared.

Why not? They asked. They wanted their stories told. And it was hard to explain; in those circles, that everything they told me went into the wastebasket or at least the dead—end file because the lead paragraphs I wrote for that article didn't satisfy some editor three thousand miles away—some nervous drone behind a grey formica desk in the bowels of a journalistic bureaucracy that no con in Nevada will ever understand—and that the article finally died on the vine, as it were, because I refused to rewrite the lead. For reasons of my own. None of which would make much sense in The Yard. But what the hell? Why worry about details? I turned to face my accuser, a small young clerk with a big smile on his face and a yellow envelope in his hand. "I've been calling your room," he said. "Then I saw you standing outside." I nodded, too tired to resist. By now the Shark was beside me, but I saw no point in even tossing my bag into it. The game was up. They had me.

The clerk was still smiling. "This telegram just came for you," he said. "But actually it isn't for you. It's for somebody named Thompson, but it says 'care of Raoul Duke'; does that make sense?" I felt dizzy. It was too much to absorb all at once. From freedom, to prison, and then back to freedom again—all in thirty seconds. I staggered backwards and leaned on the car, feeling the white folds of the canvas top beneath my trembling hand. The clerk, still smiling, was poking the telegram at me.

I nodded, barely able to speak. "Yes," I said finally, "it makes sense." I accepted the envelope and tore it open:

URGENT SPEED LETTER

HUNTER S. THOMPSON c/o RAOUL DUKE SOUNDPROOF SUITE 1850

MINT HOTEL LAS VEGAS

CALL ME AT ONCE REPEAT AT ONCE WE HAVE A NEW ASSIGNMENT BEGINNING TOMORROW ALSO VEGAS DONT WE STOP THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF DISTRICT ATTORNEYS INVITES YOU TO THEIR FOUR DAY SEMINAR ON NARCOTICS AND DANGEROUS DRUGS AT DUNES HOTEL STOP ROLLING STONE CALLED THEY WANT 50 THOUSAND WORDS MASSIVE PAYMENT TOTAL EXPENSES INCLUDING ALL SAMPLES STOP WE

HAVE RESERVATIONS AT HOTEL FLAMINGO AND WHITE CADDY CONVERTIBLE STOP EVERYTHING IS ARRANGED CALL IMMEDIATELY FOR DETAILS URGENT REPEAT URGENT STOP DOCTOR GONZO

“Holy shit!” I muttered. “This can’t be true!"

“You mean it’s not for you?” the clerk asked, suddenly nervous. “I checked the register for this man Thompson. We don’t show him, but I thought he was part of your team."

“He is,” I said quickly. “Don’t worry, I’ll get it to him.” I tossed my bag into the front seat of the Shark, wanting to leave before my stay of execution ran out. But the clerk was still curious.

“What about Doctor Gonzo?” he said.

I stared at him, giving him a full taste of the mirrors. “He’s fine,” I said. “But he has a vicious temper. The Doctor handles our finances, makes all our arrangements.” I slid into the driver’s seat and prepared to leave.

The clerk leaned into the car. “What confused us,” he said, “was Doctor Gonzo’s signature on this telegram from Los Angeles—when we knew he was here in the hotel.” He shrugged. “And then to have the telegram addressed to some guest we couldn’t account for .. . well, this delay was unavoidable. You understand, I hope....” I nodded, impatient to flee. “You did the right thing,” I “Never try to understand a press message. About half time we use codes—especially with Doctor Gonzo.” I smiled again, but this time it seemed a trifle odd. “Tell me,” he said, “when will the doctor be awake?” I tensed at the wheel, “Awake? What do you mean?” He seemed uncomfortable. “Well...the manager, Mister Heem, would like to meet him.” Now his grin was definitely malevolent. “Nothing unusual. Mr. Heem likes to meet all our large accounts...put them on a personal basis...just a chat and a handshake, you understand."

“Of course,” I said. “But if I were you I’d leave the doctor alone until after he’s eaten breakfast. He’s a very crude man.” The clerk nodded warily. “But he will be available. Perhaps later this morning?” I saw what he was getting at. “Look,” I said. “That telegram was all scrambled. It was actually from Thompson, not to him. Western Union must have got the names reversed.” I held up the telegram, knowing he’d already read it. “What this is,” I said, “is a speed message to Doctor Gonzo, upstairs, saying Thompson is on his way out from L.A. with a new assignment—a new work order.” I waved him off the car. “See you later,” I snapped. “I have to get out to the

track." He backed away as I eased the car into low gear. "There's no hurry," he called after me. "The race is over."

"Not for me," I said, tossing him a quick friendly wave.

"Let's have lunch!" he shouted as I turned into the street.

"Righto!" I yelled. And then I was off into traffic. After a few blocks in the wrong direction on Main Street, I doubled back and aimed south, towards L.A. But with all deliberate speed. Keep cool and slow, I thought. Just drift to the city limits....

What I needed was a place to get safely off the road, out of sight, and ponder this incredible telegram from my attorney. It was true; I was certain of that. There was a definite valid urgency in the message. The tone was unmistakable. .

But I was in no mood or condition to spend another week in Las Vegas. Not now. I had pushed my luck about as far as it was going to carry me in this town...all the way out to the edge. And now the weasels were closing in; I could smell the ugly brutes.

Yes, it was definitely time to leave. My margin had shrunk to nothing.

Now idling along Las Vegas Boulevard at thirty miles an hour, I wanted a place to rest and formalize the decision. It was settled, of course, but I needed a beer or three to seal the bargain and stupefy that one rebellious nerve end that kept vibrating negative...

It would have to be dealt with. Because there was an argument, of sorts, for staying on. It was treacherous, stupid and demented in every way—but there was no avoiding the stench of twisted humor that hovered around the idea of a gonzo journalist in the grip of a potentially terminal drug episode being invited to cover the National District Attorneys' Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

There was also a certain bent appeal in the notion of running a savage burn on one Las Vegas Hotel and then—instead of becoming a doomed fugitive on the highway to L.A.—just wheeling across town, trading in the red Chevy convertible for a white Cadillac and checking into another Vegas hotel, with press credentials to mingle with a thousand ranking cops from all over America, while they harangued each other about the Drug Problem.

It was dangerous lunacy, but it was also the kind of thing a real connoisseur of edge—work could make an argument for. Where, for instance, was the last place the Las Vegas police would look for a drug—addled fraud—fugitive who just ripped off a downtown hotel?

Right. In the middle of a National District Attorneys' Drug Conference at an elegant hotel on the strip.... Arriving at Caesar's Palace for the Tom Jones dinner show in a flashing white Coupe de Ville...At a cocktail party for narcotics agents and their wives at the Dunes?

Indeed, what better place to hide? For some people. But not for me. And certainly not for my attorney—a very conspicuous person. Separately, we might pull it off. But together, no—we would blow it. Too much aggressive chemistry in that mix; the temptation to run a deliberate freakout would be too heavy.

And that of course would finish us. They would show us no mercy. To infiltrate the infiltrators would be to accept the fate of all spies: "As always, if you or any member of your organization is apprehended by the enemy, the Secretary will deny any Knowledge,.... .

No, it was too much. The line between madness and masochism was already hazy; the time had come to pull back...to retire, hunker down, back off and "cop out," as it were. Why not? In every gig like this, there comes a time to either cut your losses or consolidate your winnings—whichever fits.

I drove slowly, looking for a proper place to sit down with an early morning beer and get my head together...to plot this unnatural retreat.

11. Aaawww, Mama, Can This Really Be the End? Down and Out in Vegas, with Amphetamine Psychosis Again?

Tuesday, 9:00 A.M.... Now, sitting in "Wild Bill's Cafe" on the oputskirts of Las Vegas, I saw it all very learly. There only one road to L.A.—U.S. Intertate 15, a straightrun with no backroads or alternate routes, just a flatout highspeed burn through Baker and Barstow and Berdoo and then on the Hollywood Freeway straight into frantic oblivion: safetly, obscurity, just another freak in the Freak Kingdom.

But in the meantime, for the next five or six hours, I'd be the most conspicsous thing on this goddamn evil road—the only fireapplered shark convertible between Butte and Tijauana...blazing along this desert highway with a half naked hillbilly mental case at the wheel. Is it better to wear my purple and green Acapulco shirt, or nothing at all?

No way to hide in this monster.

This will not be a happy run. Not even the Sun God wants to watch. He is gone behind a cloud for the first time in three days. No sun at all. The sky is grey and ugly.

Just as I pulled into Wild Bill’s backstreet, halfhidden parking lot I heard a roar overhead and looked up to see a big silver smoketrailing DC-8 taking off—about two thousand feet above the highway. Was Lacerda aboard? The man fom Life? Did they have all the photos they needed? All the facts? Had they fulfilled their responsibilities?

I didn’t even know who’d won the race. Maybe nobody. For all I knew, the whole spectacle had been aborted by a terrible riot—an orgy of senseless violence, kicked off by drunken hoodlums who refused to abide by the rules.

I wanted to plug this gap in my knowledge at the earliest opportunity: Pick up the L.A. Times and scour the sports section for a Mint 400 story. Get the details. Cover myself. Even on the Run, in the grip of a serious Fear...

I knew it was Lacerda in that plane, heading back to New York. He told me last night that he meant to catch the first flight.

So there he goes...and here I am, with no attorney, slumped on a red plastic stool in Wild Bill’s Tavern, nervously sipping a Budweiser in a bar just coming awake to an early morning rush of pimps and pinball hustlers .. . with a huge Red Shark just outside the door so full of felonies that I’m afraid to even look at it.

But I can’t abandon the fucker. The only hope is to somehow get it across three hundred miles of open road between here and Sanctuary. But, sweet Jesus, I am tired! I’m scared. I’m crazy. This culture has beaten me down. What the fuck am I doing out here? This is not even the story I was supposed to be working on. My agent warned me against it. All signs were negative—especially that evil Dwark with the pink telephone in the Polo Lounge. I should have stayed there...anything but this.

Aaawww . .. Mama can this really be the end?

No!

Who played that song? Did I actually hear that fucking thing on the jukebox just now? At 9:19 on this filthy grey morning in Wild Bill’s Tavern?

No. That was only in my brain, some long—lost echo of a painful dawn in Toronto...a long time ago, half—mad in another world..., but no different.

HELP!

How many more nights and weird mornings can this terrible shit go on? How long can the body and the brain tolerate this doom—struck craziness?

This grinding of teeth, this pouring of sweat, this pounding of blood in the temples...small blue veins gone amok in front of the ears, sixty and seventy hours with no sleep.

And now that is the jukebox! Yes, no doubt about it and why not? A very popular song: “Like a bridge over troubled water . .. I will lay me down...” BOOM. Flashing paranoia. What kind of rat—bastard psychotic would play that song—right now, at this moment? Has somebody followed me here? Does the bartendress know who I am? Can she see me behind these mirrors?

All bartenders are treacherous, but this one is a surly middle—aged fat woman wearing a muu—muu and Iron Boy overalls...probably Wild Bill’s woman.

Jesus, bad waves of paranoia, madness, fear and loathing—intolerable vibrations in this place. Get out. Flee...and suddenly it occurs to me, some final flash of lunatic shrewdness before the darkness closes in, that my legal/hotel checkout time is not until noon...which gives me at least two hours of legitimate high—speed driving to get out of this goddamn state before I become a fugitive in the eyes of the law.

Wonderful luck. By the time the alarm goes off, I can be running full bore somewhere between Needles and Death Valley—jamming the accelerator through the floorboard and shaking my fist up at Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., swooping down on me in his FBI/Screaming Eagle helicopter.

YOU CAN RUN, BUT YOU CAN’T HIDE (...warning to smack dealers seen on a bulletin board in Boulder, CO.)

Fuck you, Efrem, that wisdom cuts both ways.

As far as you and the Mint people know, I am still up there l850—legally and spiritually if not in the actual flesh—a “Do Not Disturb” sign hung out to ward off disturb—The maids won’t come near that room as long as that sign is on the doorknob. My attorney saw to that—along with 600 bars of Neutrogena soap that I still have to deliver to Malibu. What will the FBI make of that? This Great Red Shark full of Neutrogena soap bars? All completely legal. The maids gave us that soap. They’ll swear to it...Or will they?

Of course not. Those goddamn treacherous maids will swear they were menaced by two heavily—armed crazies who threatened them with a Vincent Black Shadow unless they gave up all their soap.

Jesus Creeping God! Is there a priest in this tavern? I want to confess! I'm a fucking sinner! Venal, mortal, carnal, major, minor—however you want to call it, Lord...I'm guilty.

But do me this one last favor: just give me five more high—speed hours before you bring the hammer down; just let me get rid of this goddamn car and off of this horrible desert.

Which is not really a hell of a lot to ask, Lord, because the incredible truth is that I am not guilty. All I did was take your gibberish seriously...and you see where it got me? My primitive Christian instincts have made me a criminal. Creeping through the casino at six in the morning with a suitcase full of grapefruit and "Mint 400" T—shirts, I remember telling myself, over and over again, "You are not guilty." This is merely a necessary expedient, to avoid a nasty scene. After all, I made no binding agreements; this is an institutional debt—nothing personal. This whole goddamn nightmare is the fault of that stinking, irresponsible magazine. Some fool in New York did this to me. It was his idea, Lord, not mine.

And now look at me: half—crazy with fear, driving 120 miles an hour across Death Valley in some car I never even wanted. You evil bastard! This is your work! You'd better take care of me, Lord...because if you don't you're going to have me on your hands.

12. Hellish Speed...Grappling with the California Highway Patrol...Mano a Mano on Highway 61

Tuesday, 12:30 P.M....Baker, California...Into the Ballantine Ale now, zombie drunk and nervous. I recognize this feeling: three or four days of booze, drugs, sun, no sleep and burned out adrenalin reserves—a giddy, quavering sort of high that means the crash is coming. But when? How much longer? This tension is part of the high. The possibility of physical and mental collapse is very real now ... but collapse is out of the question; as a solution or even a cheap alternative, it is unacceptable. Indeed. This is the moment of truth, that fine and fateful line between control and disaster —which is also the difference between staying loose and weird on the streets, or spending the next five years of summer mornings playing basketball in the yard at Carson City.

No sympathy for the devil; keep that in mind. Buy the ticket, take the ride . . . and if it occasionally gets a little heavier than what you had in mind, well . . . maybe chalk it off to forced consciousness expansion: Tune in, freak out, get eaten. It's all in Kesey's Bible....The Far Side of Reality.

And so much for bad gibberish; not even Kesey can help me I have just had two very bad emotional experiences—with the California Highway Patrol and another with a phantom hitchhiker who may or may not have been who I thought it was—and now, feeling right on the verge of a bad psychotic episode, I am hunkered down with my tape machine in a "beer bar" that is actually the back room of a huge Hardware Barn—all kinds of plows and harnesses and piled—up fertilizer bags, and wondering how it all happened.

About five miles back I had a brush with the CHP. Not stopped or pulled over: nothing routine. I always drive properly. A bit fast, perhaps, but always with consummate skill and a natural feel for the road that even cops recognize. No cop was ever born who isn't a sucker for a finely—executed hi—speed Controlled Drift all the way around one of those cloverleaf freeway interchanges.

Few people understand the psychology of dealing with a highway traffic cop. Your normal speeder will panic and immediately pull over to the side when he sees the big red light behind him...and then we will start apologizing, begging for mercy.

This is wrong. It arouses contempt in the cop—heart. The thing to do—when you're running along about a hundred or so and you suddenly find a red—flashing CHP—tracker on your trail—what you want to do then is accelerate. Never pull over with the first siren—howl. Mash it down and make the bastard chase you at speeds up to 120 all the way to the next exit. He will follow. But he won't know what to make of your blinker—signal that says you're about to turn right.

This is to let him know you're looking for a proper place to pull off and talk . .. keep signaling and hope for an off—ramp, one of those uphill side—loops with a sign saying "Max Speed 25"...and the trick, at this point, is to suddenly leave the freeway and take him into the chute at no less than a hundred miles an hour.

He will lock his brakes about the same time you lock yours, but it will take him a moment to realize that he's about to make a 180—degree turn at this speed . .. but you will be ready for it, braced for the Gs and the fast heel—toe work, and with any luck at all you will have come to a complete stop off the road at the top of the turn and be standing beside your automobile by the time he catches up.

He will not be reasonable at first...but no matter. Let him calm down. He will want the first word. Let him have it. His brain will be in a turmoil: he may begin jabbering, or even pull his gun. Let him unwind; keep smiling. The idea is to show him that you were always in total control of yourself and your vehicle—while he lost control of everything.

It helps to have a police/press badge in your wallet when he calms down enough to ask for your license. I had one of these—but I also had a can of Budweiser in my hand. Until that moment, I was unaware that I was holding it. I had felt totally on top of the situation...but when I looked down and saw that little red/silver evidence—bomb in my hand, I knew I was fucked. .

Speeding is one thing, but Drunk Driving is quite another. The cop seemed to grasp this—that I'd blown my whole performance by forgetting the beer can. His face relaxed, he actually smiled. And so did I. Because we both understood, in that moment, that my Thunder Road, moonshine—bomber act had been totally wasted: We had both scared the piss out of ourselves for nothing at all—because the fact of this beer can in my hand made any argument about "speeding" beside the point.

He accepted my open wallet with his left hand, then extended his right toward the beer can. "Could I have that?" he asked.

"Why not?" I said.

He took it, then held it up between us and poured the beer out on the road.

I smiled, no longer caring. "It was getting warm, anyway," said. Just behind me, on the back seat of the Shark, I couldabout ten cans of hot Budweiser and a dozen or so grapefruits. I'd forgotten all about them, but now they were too obvious for either one of us to ignore. My guilt was so gross and overwhelming that explanations were useless.

The cop understood this. "You realize," he said, "that it's a crime to . .

"Yeah," I said. "I know. I'm guilty. I understand that. I knew it was a crime, but I did it anyway." I shrugged. "Shit, why argue? I'm a fucking criminal."

"That's a strange attitude," he said.

I stared at him, seeing for the first time that I was dealing with a bright—eyed young sport, around thirty, who was apparently enjoying his work.

"You know," he said, "I get the feeling you could use a nap." He nodded. "There's a rest area up ahead. Why don't you pull over and sleep a

few hours?” I instantly understood what he was telling me, but for some insane reason I shook my head. “A nap won’t help,”I said. “I’ve been awake for too long—three or four nights; I can’t even remember. If I go to sleep now, I’m dead for twenty hours.” Good God, I thought. What have I said? This bastard is trying to be human; he could take me straight to jail, but he’s telling me to take a fucking nap. For Christ sake, agree with him: Yes, officer, of course I’ll take advantage of that rest area. And I can’t tell you how grateful I am for this break you want to give me.

But no...here I was insisting that if he turned me loose I would boom straight ahead for L.A. which was true, but why say it? Why push him? This is not the right time for a show—down. This is Death Valley...get a grip on yourself.

Of course. Get a grip. “Look,” I said. “I’ve been out in Las Vegas covering the Mint 400.” I pointed to the “VIP Parking” sticker on the windshield. “Incredible,” I said. “All those bikes and dune buggies crashing around the desert for two days. Have you seen it?” He smiled, shaking his head’ with a sort of melancholy un—derstanding. I could see him thinking. Was I dangerous? Was he ready for the vicious, time—consuming scene that was bound to come if he took me under arrest? How many off—duty hours would he have to spend hanging around the courthouse, waiting to testify against me? And what kind of monster lawyer would I bring in to work out on him?

I knew, but how could he?

“OK,“ he said. “Here’s how it is. What goes into my book, as of noon, is that I apprehended you...for driving too fast conditions, and advised you...with this written warning—he handed it to me—”to proceed no further than the next rest area...your stated destination, right? Where you an to take a long nap ...“ He hung his ticket—pad back on his belt. “Do I make myself clear?” he asked as he turned away.

I shrugged. “How far is Baker? I was hoping to stop there for lunch."

“That’s not in my jurisdiction,” he said. “The city limits are two—point—two miles beyond the rest area. Can you make it that far?” He grinned heavily.

“I’ll try,” I said. “I’ve been wanting to go to Baker for a long time. I’ve heard a lot about it."

“Excellent seafood,” he said. “With a mind like yours, you’ll probably want the land—crab. Try the Majestic Diner.”

I shook my head and got back in the car, feeling raped. The pig had done me on all fronts, and now he was going off to chuckle about it—on the west edge of town, waiting for me to make a run for L.A.

I got back on the freeway and drove past the rest area to the intersection where I had to turn right into Baker. As I am proached the turn I saw...Great Jesus, it's him, the hitchhiker, the same kid we'd picked up and terrified on the way out to Vegas. Our eyes met as I slowed down to make the corner. I was tempted to wave, but when I saw him drop his thumb I thought, no, this is not the time...

God only knows what that kid said about us when he finally got back to town. Get out of sight at once. How could I be surerecognized me? But the car was hard to miss. And why would he back away from the road?

Suddenly I had two personal enemies in this godforsaken town. The CHP cop would bust me for sure if I tried to go on through to L.A., and this goddamn rotten kid/hitchhiker would have me hunted down like a beast if I stayed. (Holy Jesus, Sam! There he is! That guy the kid told us about! He's back!) Either way, it was horrible—and if these righteous outback predators ever got their stories together...and they would; it was inevitable in a town this small...that would cash my check all around. I'd be lucky to leave town alive. A ball of tar and feathers dragged onto the prison bus by angry natives.

This was it: The crisis. 1 raced through town and found a telephone booth on the northern outskirts, between a Sinclair station and...yes...the Majestic Diner. I placed an emergency collect call to my attorney in Malibu. He answered at once.

"They've nailed me!" I shouted. "I'm trapped in some stinking desert crossroads called Baker. I don't have much time. The fuckers are closing in."

"Who?" he said. "You sound a little paranoid."

"You bastard!" I screamed. "First I got run down by the CHP, then that kid spotted me! I need a lawyer immediately!"

"What are you doing in Baker?" he said. "Didn't you get my telegram?"

"What? Fuck telegrams. I'm in trouble."

"You're supposed to be in Vegas," he said. "We have a suite at the Flamingo. I was just about to leave for the airport...

I slumped in the booth. It was too horrible. Here I was calling my attorney in a moment of terrible crisis and the fool was deranged on drugs

—a goddamn vegetable! “You worthless bastard,” I groaned. “I’ll cripple your ass for this! All that shit in the car is yours! You understand that? When I finish testifying out here, you’ll be disbarred!"

“You brainless scumbag!” he shouted. “I sent you a telegram! You’re supposed to be covering the National District Attorneys’ Conference! I made all the reservations...rented a white Cadillac convertible...the whole thing is arranged! What the hell are you doing out there in the middle the fucking desert?” Suddenly I remembered. Yes. The telegram. It was all very clear. My mind became calm. I saw the whole thing in a flash. “Never mind,” I said. “It’s all a big joke. I’m actually sitting beside the pool at the Flamingo. I’m talking from a portable phone. Some dwarf brought it out from the casino. I have total credit! Can you grasp that?” I was breathing heavily, feeling crazy, sweating into the phone.

“Don’t come anywhere near this place!” I shouted. “Foreigners aren’t welcome here.” I hung up and strolled out to the car. Well, I thought. This is how the world works. All energy flows according to the whims of the Great Magnet. What a fool I was to defy him. He knew. He knew all along. It was He who sacked me in Baker. I had run far enough, so He nailed me...closing off all my escape routes, hassling me first with the CHP and then with this filthy phantom hitchhiker...plunging me into fear and confusion.

Never cross the Great Magnet. I understood this now .and with understanding came a sense of almost terminal relief. Yes, I would go back to Vegas. Slip the Kid and confound the CHP by moving East again, instead of West. This would be the shrewdest move of my life. Back to Vegas and sign up for the Drugs and Narcotics conference; me and a thousand pigs. Why not? Move coilfidently into their midst. Register at the Flamingo and have the White Caddy sent over at once. Do it right; remember Horatio Alger. ..

I looked across the road and saw a huge red sign that said BEER. Wonderful. I left the Shark by the phone booth and reeled across the highway into the Hardware Barn. A Jew loomed up from behind a pile of sprockets and asked me what I wanted.

“Ballantine Ale,” I said . .. a very mystic long shot, unknown between Newark and San Francisco.

He served it up, ice—cold.

I relaxed. Suddenly everything was going right; I wasfinally getting the breaks.

The bartender approached me with a smile. “Where yaheadin’, young man?"

“Las Vegas,” I said.

He smiled. “A great town, that Vegas. You’ll have good luck there; you’re the type."

“I know,” I said. “I’m a Triple Scorpio.” He seemed pleased. “That’s a fine combination,” he said. “You can’t lose.” I laughed. “Don’t worry,” I said. “I’m actually the districtattorney from Ignoto county. Just another good American like yourself.” His smile disappeared. Did he understand? I couldn’t be sure. But that hardly mattered now. I was going back to Vegas. I had no choice.

Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas

PART TWO

About 20 miles east of Baker I stopped to check the drug bag. The sun was hot and I felt like killing something. Anything. Even a big lizard. Drill the fucker. I got my attorney’s .357 Magnum out of the trunk and spun the cylinder. It was loaded all the way around: Long, nasty little slugs—158 grains with a fine flat trajectory and painted aztec gold on the tips. I blew the horn a few times, hoping to call up an iguana. Get the buggers moving. They were out there, I knew, in that goddamn sea of cactus—hunkered down, barely breathing, and every one of the stinking little bastards was loaded with deadly poison.

Three fast explosions knocked me off balance. Three deafening, double—action blasts from the .357 in my right hand. Jesus! Firing at nothing, for no reason at all. Bad craziness. I tossed the gun into the front seat of the Shark and stared nervously at the highway. No cars either way; the road was empty for two or three miles in both directions.Fine luck. It would not do to be found in the desert under these circumstances: firing wildly into the cactus from a car full of drugs. And especially not now, on the lam from the Highway Patrol.

Awkward questions would arise: “Well now, Mister .. . ah...Duke; you understand, of course, that it is illegal to dise a firearm of any kind while standing on a federal way?” What? Even in self—defense? This goddamn gun has a hair trigger, officer. The truth is I only meant to fire once—just to scare the little bastards.” A heavy stare, then speaking very slowly: “Are you saying, Mister Duke...that you were attacked out here?"

“Well...no...not literally attacked, officer, but seriously menaced. I stopped to piss, and the minute I stepped out of the car these filthy little bags of poison were all around me. They moved like greased lightning!” Would this story hold up?

No. They would place me under arrest, then routinely search the car—and when that happened all kinds of savage hell would break loose. They would never believe all these drugs were necessary to my work; that in truth I was a professional journalist on my way to Las Vegas to cover the National District Attorneys’ Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

“Just samples, officer. I got this stuff off a road man for the Neo—American Church back in Barstow. He started acting funny, so I worked

him over.” Would they buy this?

No. They would lock me in some hellhole of a jail and beat me on the kidneys with big branches—causing me to piss blood for years to come.

Luckily, nobody bothered me while I ran a quick inventory on the kit—bag. The stash was a hopeless mess, all churned together and half—crushed. Some of the mescaline pellets had disintegrated into a reddish—brown powder, but I counted about thirty—five or forty still intact. My attorney had eaten all the reds, but there was quite a bit of speed left...no more grass, the coke bottle was empty, one acid blotter, a nice brown lump of opium hash and six loose amyls . . . Not enough for anything serious, but a careful rationing of the mescaline would probably get us through the four—day Drug Conference.

On the outskirts of Vegas I stopped at a neighborhood pharmacy and bought two quarts of Gold tequila, two fifths of Chivas Regal and a pint of ether. I was tempted to ask for some amyls. My angina pectoris was starting to act up. But druggist had the eyes of a mean Baptist hysteric. I told n I needed the ether to get the tape off my legs, but by that time he’d already rung the stuff up and bagged it. He didn’t give a fuck about ether.

I wondered what he would say if I asked him for $22 worth Romilar and a tank of nitrous oxide. Probably he would sold it to me. Why not? Free enterprise....

Give the public what it needs—especially this bad—sweaty, nervous talkin’ fella with tape all over his legs and this terrible cough, along with angina pectoris and these godawful Aneuristic flashes every time he gets in the sun. I mean this fella was in bad shape, officer. How the hell was I to know he’d walk straight out to his car and start abusing those drugs?

How indeed? I lingered a moment at the magazine rack, then got a grip on myself and hurried outside to the car. The idea of going completely crazy on laughing gas in the middle of a DAs’ drug conference had a definite warped appeal. But not on the first day, I thought. Save that for later. No point getting busted and committed before the conference even starts.

I stole a Review—Journal from a rack in the parking lot, but I threw it away after reading a story on page one:

SURGERY UNCERTAIN AFTER EYES REMOVED

BALTIMORE (UPI)—Doctors said Friday they were uncertain whether surgery would succeed in restoring the eyesight of a young man who pulled

out his eyes while suffering the effects of a drug over(lose in a jail cell. Charles Innes, Jr., 25, underwent surgery late Thursday at Maryland General Hospital but doctors said it be weeks before they could determine the outcome. statement issued by the hospital reported that Innes uo light perception in either eye prior to surgery and the possibility he will ever have light perception is extremely poor.” Innes, son of a prominent Massachusetts Republican, was found in a jail cell Thursday by a turnkey who said Innes had pulled out his eyeballs.

Innes was arrested Wednesday night while walking nude through a neighborhood near where he lived. He was examined at Mercy Hospital and then placed in a jail cell. Police and one of Innes’ friends said he had taken an overdose of animal tranquilizer.

Police reported the drug was PCP, a Parke—Davis product not sold for human medical purposes since 1963. However, a spokesman for Parke—Davis said he thought the drug might be available on the black market.

Taken alone, the spokesman said PCP effects would not last more than 12 to 14 hours. However, the effects of PCP combined with an hallucinogen such as LSD were not known.

Innes told a neighbor last Saturday, the day after he first took the drug, that his eyes were bothering him and that he could not read.

Wednesday night police said Innes seemed to be in a deeply depressed state and so impervious to pain that he did not scream when he pulled out his eyes.

2. Another Day, Another Convertible...& Another Hotel Full of Cops

The first order of business was to get rid of the Red Shark. It was too obvious. Too many people might recognize it, especially the Vegas police; although as far as they knew, the thing was already back home in L.A. It was last seen running at top speed across Death Valley on Interstate 15. Stopped and warned in Baker by the CHP...then suddenly disapeared...

The last place they would look for it, I felt, was in a rental—car lot at the airport. I had to go out there anyway, to meet my attorney. He would be arriving from L.A. in the late afternoon.

I drove very quietly on the freeway, gripping my normal instinct for bursts of acceleration and sudden lane changes—trying to remain inconspicuous—and when I got there I parked the Shark between two old Air Force buses in a “utility lot” about half a mile from the terminal. Very

tall buses. Make it hard as possible for the fuckers. A little walking never hurt anybody.

By the time I got to the terminal I was pouring sweat. But nothing abnormal. I tend to sweat heavily in warm climates.clothes are soaking wet from dawn to dusk. This worried at first, but when I went to a doctor and described my normal daily intake of booze, drugs and poison he told me to come back when the sweating stopped. That would be the danger point, he said—a sign that my body's desperately overworked flushing mechanism had broken down completely. "I have great faith in the natural processes," he said. "But in your case...well...I find no precedent. We'll just have to wait and see, then work with what's left." I spent about two hours in the bar, drinking Bloody Marys for the V—8 nutritional content and watching the flights from L.A. I'd eaten nothing but grapefruit for about twenty hours and my head was adrift from its moorings.

You better watch yourself, I thought. There are limits to what the human body can endure. You don't want to break down and start bleeding from the ears right here in the terminal. Not in this town. In Las Vegas they kill the weak and deranged.

I realized this, and kept quiet even when I felt symptoms of a terminal blood—sweat coming on. But this passed. I saw the cocktail waitress getting nervous, so I forced myself to get up and walk stiffly out of the bar. No sign of my attorney.

Down to the VIP car—rental booth, where I traded the Red Shark in for a White Cadillac Convertible. "This goddamn Chevy has caused me a lot of trouble," I told them. "I get the feeling that people are putting me down—especially in gas stations, when I have to get out and open the hood manually."

"Well...of course," said the man behind the desk. "What you need, I think, is one of our Mercedes 600 Towne—Cruiser Specials, with air—conditioning. You can even carry your own fuel, if you want; we make that available.

"Do I look like a goddamn Nazi?" I said. "I'll have a natural American car, or nothing at all!" They called up the white Coupe de Ville at once. Every—thing was automatic. I could sit in the red—leather driver's seat and make every inch of the car jump, by touching the proper buttons. It was a wonderful machine: Ten grand worth of gimmicks and high—priced Special Effects. The rear—windows leaped up with a touch, like frogs in a

dynamite pond. The white canvas top ran up and down like a roller—coaster. The dashboard was full of esoteric lights & dials & meters that I would never understand—but there was no doubt in my mind that I was into a superior machine.

The Caddy wouldn’ tget off the line quite as fast as the RedShark, but once it got rol around eighty—it was pure smooth hell...all that elegant, upholstered weight lashing across the desert was like rolling through midnight on the old California Zephyr.—- I handled the whole transaction with a credit card that I later learned was “banceled”—completely bogus. But the Big Computer hsdn’t mixed me yet, so I was still a fat gold credit risk.

Later, looking back on this transaction, I knew the conversation that had almost certainly etisued: “Hello. This is VIP car—rentals in Las Vegas. We’re calling to check on Number 875—045—6169. Just a routine credit check, nothing urgent...(Long pause at the other end. Then:) “Holy shit!"

“What?"

“Pardon me... Yes, we have that number. It’s been placed on emergency redline status. Call the police at once and don’t let him out of your sight!” (Another long pause) “Well...ah...you see, that number is not on our current Red List, and...ah...Number875—045—616—B just left our lot in a new Cadillac convertible."

“No!"

“Yes. He’s long gone; totally insured."

“Where?"

“I think he said St. Louis. Yes, that’s what the card says.

Raoul Duke, leftfielder & batting champion of the St. Loui sBrowns. Five days at $25 per, plus twenty—five cents a mile.His card was valid, so of course we had no choice...This is true. The car rental agency had no legal reason to hassle me, since my card was technically valid. During the next four days I drove that car all over Las Vegas—even the VIP agency’s main office on Paradise Boulevard several times—and at no time was I bothered by any show of rudeness.

This is one of the hallmarks of Vegas hospitality. The only bedrock rule is Don’t Burn the Locals. Beyond that, nobody cares. They would rather not know. If Charlie Manson checked into the Sahara tomorrow morning, nobody would hassle him as long as he tipped big.

I drove straight to the hotel after renting the car. There was still no sign of my attorney, so I decided to check in on my own—if only to get off the street and avoid a public breakdown. I left the Whale in a VIP parking slot and shambled self—consciously into the lobby with one small leather bag—a hand—crafted, custom—built satchel that had just been made for me by a leathersmith friend in Boulder.

Our room was at the Flamingo, in the nerve—center of theStrip: right across the street from Caesar's Palace and the Dunes—site of the Drug Conference. The bulk of the conferees were staying at the Dunes, but those of us who signed up fashionably late were assigned to the Flamingo.

The place was full of cops. I saw this at a glance. Most of them were just standing around trying to look casual, all dressed exactly alike in their cut—rate Vegas casuals: plaid bermuda shorts, Arnie Palmer golf shirts and hairless white legs tapering down to rubberized "beach sandals." It was a terrifying scene to walk into—a super stakeout of some kind. If I hadn't known about the conference my mind might have snapped. You got the impression that somebody was going to be gunned down in a blazing crossfire at any moment—maybe the entire Manson Family.

My arrival was badly timed. Most of the national DAs and other cop—types had already checked in. These were the people who now stood around the lobby and stared grimly at newcomers. What appeared to be the Final Stakeout was only about two hundred vacationing cops with nothing better to do. They didn't even notice each other.

I waded up to the desk and got in line. The man in front of me was a Police Chief from some small town in Michigan. His Agnew—style wife was standing about three feet off to his right while he argued with the desk clerk: "Look, fella—I told you I have a postcard here that says I have reservations in this hotel. Hell, I'm with the District Attorneys' Conference! I've already paid for my room."

"Sorry, sir. You're on the 'late list.' Your reservations were transferred to the...ah...Moonlight Motel, which is out on Paradise Boulevard and actually a very fine place of lodging and only sixteen blocks from here, with its own pool and...

"You dirty little faggot! Call the manager! I'm tired of listening to this dogshit!" The manager appeared and offered to call a cab. This was obviously the second or maybe even the third act in a cruel drama that had begun long before I showed up. The police chief's wife was crying; the

gaggle of friends that he'd mustered for support were too embarrassed to back him up—even now, in this showdown at the desk, with this angry little cop firing his best and final shot. They knew he was beaten; he was going against the RULES, and the people hired to enforce those rules said "no vacancy.

After ten minutes of standing in line behind this noisy little asshole and his friends, I felt the bile rising. Where did this cop—of all people—get the nerve to argue with anybody in terms of Right & Reason? I had been there with these fuzzy shitheads—and so, I sensed, had the desk clerk. He had airof a man who'd been fucked around, in his time, by a good cross—section of mean—tempered rule—crazy now he was just giving their argument back to them: It didn't matter who's right or wrong, man...or who's paid & who hasn't...what matters right now is that for at time in my life I can work out on a pig: "Fuck you, I'm in charge here, and I'm telling you we don't have for you." I was enjoying this whipsong, but after a while I felt dizzy, nervous, and my impatience got the better of my amusement. So I stepped around the Pig and spoke directly to the desk clerk—"Say," I said, "I hate to interrupt, but I have a reservation and I wonder if maybe I could just sort of slide through and get out of your way." I smiled, letting him know I'd been digging his snake—bully act on the cop party that was now standing there, psychologically off—balance and staring at me like I was some kind of water—rat crawling up to the desk.

I looked pretty bad: wearing old Levis and white Chuck Taylor All—Star basketball sneakers...and my ten—peso Acapulco shirt had long since come apart at the shoulder seams from all that road—wind. My beard was about three days old, bordering on standard wino trim, and my eyes were totally hidden by Sandy Bull's Saigon—mirror shades.

But my voice had the tone of a man who knows he has a reservation. I was gambling on my attorney's foresightbut I couldn't pass a chance to put the horn into a cop:and I was right. The reservation was in my attorney's name. The desk - clerk hit his bell to summon the bag—boy. "This is all I have with me, right now," I said, "The rest is out there in that white Cadillac convertible." I pointed to the car that we could all see parked just outside the front door. "Can you have somebody drive it around to the room?" The desk—clerk was friendly. "Don't worry about a thing, sir. Just enjoy your stay here—and if there's anything you need, just call the desk." I nodded and smiled, half—watching the stunned reaction of the cop—crowd

right next to me. They were stupid with shock. Here they were arguing with every piece of leverage they could command, for a room they'd already paid for—and suddenly their whole act gets side—swiped by some crusty drifter who looks like something out of an upper—Michigan hobo jungle. And he checks in with a handful of credit cards! Jesus! What's happening in this world?

3. Savage Lucy..."Teeth Like Baseballs, Eyes Like Jellied Fire"

I gave my bag to the boy who scurried up, and told him to bring a quart of Wild Turkey and two fifths of Bacardi Anejo with a night's worth of ice.

Our room was in one of the farthest wings of the Flamingo. The place is far more than a hotel: It is a sort of huge underfinanced Playboy Club in the middle of the desert. Something like nine separate wings, with interconnecting causeways and pools—a vast complex, sliced up by a maze of car—ramps and driveways. It took me about twenty minutes to wander from the desk to the distant wing we'd been assigned to.

My idea was to get into the room, accept the booze and baggage delivery, then smoke my last big chunk of Singapore Grey while watching Walter Cronkite and waiting for my attorney to arrive. I needed this break, this moment of peace and refuge, before we did the Drug Conference. It was going to be quite a different thing from the Mint 400. That had been observer gig, but this one would need participation—and a special stance: At the Mint 400 we were dealing with anessentially simpatico crowd, and if our behavior was gross outrageous...well, it was only a matter of degree.this time our very presence would be an outrage. We be attending the conference under false pretenses and from the start, with a crowd that was convened for d purpose of putting people like us in jail. We were the Menace—not in disguise, but stone—obvious drug abusers, with a flagrantly cranked—up act that we intended to push all the way to the limit...not to prove any final, sociological point, and not even as a conscious mockery: It was mainly a matter of life—style, a sense of obligation and even duty. If the Pigs were gathering in Vegas for a top—level Drug Conference, we felt the drug culture should be represented.

Beyond that, I'd been out, of my head for so long now, that a gig like this seemed perfectly logical. Considering the circumstances, I felt totally meshed with my karma.

Or at least I was feeling this way until I got to the big grey door that opened into Mini—Suite 1150 in the Far Wing. I rammed my key into the

knob—lock and swung the door open, thinking, “Ah, home at last!”...but the door hit something, which I recognized at once as a human form: a girl of indeterminate age with the face and form of a Pit Bull. She was wearing a shapeless blue smock and her eyes were angry...

Somehow I knew that I had the right room. I wanted to think otherwise, but the vibes were hopelessly right...and she seemed to know, too, because she made no move to stop me when I moved past her and into the suite. I tossed my leather satchel on one of the beds and looked around for what I knew I would see...my attorney .. . stark naked, standing in the bathroom door with a drug—addled grin on his face.

“You degenerate pig,” I muttered.

“It can’t be helped,” he said, nodding at the bulldog girl. “This is Lucy.” He laughed distractedly. “You know—like Lucy in the sky with diamonds . .

I nodded to Lucy, who was eyeing me with definite venom. I was clearly some kind of enemy, some ugly intrusion on her scene...and it was clear from the way she moved around the room, very quick and tense on her feet, that she was sizing me up. She was ready for violence,there was not much doubt about that. Even my attorney picked up on it.

“Lucy!” he snapped. “Lucy! Be cool, goddamnit! Remember what happened at the airport...no more of that, OK?” He smiled nervously at her. She had the look of a beast that had just been tossed into a sawdust pit to fight for its life . . . “Lucy . .. this is my client; this is Mister Duke, the famous journalist. He’s pairing for this suite, Lucy. He’s on our side.” She said nothing. I could see that she was not entirely in control of herself. Huge shoulders on the woman, and a chin like Oscar Bonavena. I sat down on the bed and casually reached into my satchel for the Mace can...and when I felt my tumb on the Shoot button I was tempted to jerk the thing out and soak her down on general principles, I desperately needed peace, rest, sanctuary. The last thing I wanted was a fight to the finish, in my own hotel room, with some kind of drug—crazed hormone monster.

My attorney seemed to understand this; he knew why my hand was in the satchel.

“No!” he shouted. “Not here! We’ll have to move out!” I shrugged. He was twisted. I could see that. And so was Lucy. Her eyes were feverish and crazy. She was staring at me like I was something that would have to be

rendered helpless before life could get back to whatever she considered normal.

My attorney idled over and put his arm around her shoulders. “Mister Duke is my friend,” he said gently. “He lovesartists. Let’s show him your paintings.” For the first time, I noticed that the room was full of artwork—maybe forty or fifty portraits, some in oil, some charcoal, all more or less the same size and all the same face. They were propped up on every flat surface. The face was vaguely familiar, but I couldn’t get a fix on it. It was a girl with a mouth, a big nose and extremely glittering eyes—a demonically sensual face; the kind of overstated, embarrassingly dramatic renderings that you find in the bedrooms of young female art students who get hung up on horses.

‘Lucy paints portraits of Barbra Streisand,” my attorney explained. “She’s an artist up in Montana.. .“ He turned to the girl. “What’s that town where you live?” She stared at him, then at me, then back at my attorney again. Then finally she said, “Kalispel. Way up north. I drew these from TV.” My attorney nodded eagerly. “Fantastic,” he said. “She came all the way down here just to give all these portraits to Barbra. We’re going over to the Americana Hotel tonight, and meet her backstage.” Lucy smiled bashfully. There was no more hostility in her. I dropped the Mace can and stood up. We obviously had a serious case on our hands. I hadn’t counted on this: Finding my attorney whacked on acid and locked into some kind of preternatural courtship.

“Well,” I said, “I guess they’ve brought the car around by now. Let’s get the stuff out of the trunk.” He nodded eagerly. “Absolutely, let’s get the stuff.” Hesmiled at Lucy. “We’ll be right back. Don’t answer the phone if it rings.” She grinned and made the one—finger Jesus freak sign. “God bless,” she said.

My attorney pulled on a pair of elephant—leg pants and a glaze—black shirt, then we hurried out of the room. I could see he was having trouble getting oriented, but I refused to humor him.

“Well ...“ I said. “What are your plans?"

“Plans?” We were waiting for the elevator.

“Lucy,” I said.

He shook his head, struggling to focus on the question. “Shit,” he said finally. “I met her on the plane and I had all that acid.” He shrugged. “You know, those little blue barrels. Jesus, she’s a religious freak. She’s running

away from home for something like the fifth time in six months. It’s terrible. I gave her that cap before I realized...shit, she’s never even had adrinkf’ “Well,” I said, “it’ll probably work out. We can keep her loaded and peddle her ass at the drug convention.” He stared at me.

“She’s perfect for this gig,” I said. “These cops will go fifty bucks a head to beat her into submission and then gang—fuck her. We can set her up in one of these back—street motels, hang pictures of Jesus all over the room, then turn these pigsloose on her...Hell, she’s strong; she’ll hold her own.” His face was twitching badly. We were in the elevator now, descending into the lobby. “Jesus Christ,” he muttered. “I knew you were sick, but I never expected to hear you actually say that kind of stuff.” He seemed stunned.

I laughed. “It’s straight economics. This girl is a godsend!” I fixed him with a natural Bogart smile, all teeth .. . Shit, we’re almost broke! And suddenly you pick up some muscle—bound loony who can make us a grand a day."

“No!” he shouted. “Stop talking like that!” The elevator door opened and we walked toward the parking lot.

“I figure she can do about four at a time,” I said. “Christ, if we keep her full of acid that’s more like two grand a day; maybe three."

“You filthy bastard!” he sputtered. “I should cave your fucking head in!” He was squinting at me, shielding his eyes from the sun. I spotted the Whale about fifty feet from the door. “There it is,” I said. “Not a bad looking car, for a pimp ..

He groaned. His face reflected the struggle that I knew he was having, in his brain, with sporadic acid rushes: Bad waves of painful intensity, followed by total confusion. When I opened the trunk of the Whale to get the bags, he got angry. “What the hell are you doing?” he snapped. “This isn’t Lucy’s car."

“I know,” I said. “It’s mine. This is my luggage."

“The fuck it is!” he shouted. “Just because I’m a goddamn ‘I lawyer doesn’t mean you can walk around stealing stuff right in front of me!” He backed away. “What the hell is wrong with you? We’ll never beat a rap like this.”

After much difficulty, we got back to the room and tried to have a serious talk with Lucy. I felt like a Nazi, but it had to be done. She was not right for us—not in this fragile situation. It was bad enough if she were only

what she appeared to be—a strange young girl in the throes of a bad psychotic episode—but what worried me far more than that was the likelihood that she would probably be just sane enough, in a few hours, to work herself into a towering Jesus—based rage at the hazy recollection of being picked up and seduced in the Los Angeles International Airport by some kind of cruel Samoan who fed her liquor and LSD, then dragged her to a Vegas hotel room and savagely penetrated every orifice in her body with his throbbing, uncircumcised member.

I had a terrible vision of Lucy crashing into Barbra Strei—sand's dressing room at the Americana and laying thisbrutal story on her. That would finish us. They would track us down and probably castrate us both, prior to booking I explained this to my attorney, who was now in tears at the idea of sending Lucy away. She was still powerfully twisted, and I felt the only solution was to get her as far as possible from the Flamingo before she got straight enough to remember where she'd been and what happened to her.

Lucy, while we argued, was lying on the patio, doing a charcoal sketch of Barbra Streisand. From memory this time. It was a full—faced rendering, with teeth like baseballs and eyes like jellied fire.

The sheer intensity of the thing made me nervous. This girl was a walking bomb. God only knows what she might be doing with all that mis—wired energy right now if she didn't have her sketch pad. And what was she going to do when she got straight enough to read The Vegas Vistitor, as I just had, and learn that Streisand wasn't due at the Americana for another three weeks?

My attorney finally agreed that Lucy would have to go. The possibility of a Mann Act conviction, resulting in disbarment proceedings and total loss of his livelihood, was a key factor in his decision. A nasty federal rap. Especially for a monster Samoan facing a typical white middle—class jury in Southern California.

"They might even call it kidnapping," I said. "Straight to the gas chamber, like Chessman. And even if you manage to beatthat, they'll send you back to Nevada for Rape and Congensual Sodomy."

"No!" he shouted. "I felt sorry for the girl, I wanted to help her!" I smiled. "That's what Fatty Arbuckle said, and you know what they did to him."

"Who?"

“Never mind,” I said. “Just picture yourself telling a jury that you tried to help this poor girl by giving her LSD and then taking her out to Vegas for one of your special stark—naked back rubs.” He shook his head sadly. “You’re right. They’d probably burn me at the goddamn stake...set me on fire right there in the dock. Shit, it doesn’t pay to try to help somebody these days ..

We coaxed Lucy down to the car, telling her that we thought it was about time to “go meet Barbra.” We had no trouble convincing her that she should take all her artwork, but she couldn’t understand why my attorney wanted to bring her suitcase along. “I don’t want to embarrass her,” she protested. “She’ll think I’m trying to move in with her, or something.”

“No she won’t,” I said quickly...but that was all I could think of to say. I felt like Martin Bormann. What would happen to this poor wretch when we cut her loose? Jail? White slavery? What would Dr. Darwin do under these circumstances? (Survival of the...fittest? Was that the proper word? Had Darwin ever considered the idea of temporary unfitness? Like “temporary insanity.” Could the Doctor have made room in his theory for a thing like LSD?) All this was academic, of course. Lucy was a potentially fatal millstone on both our necks. There was absolutely no choice but to cut her adrift and hope her memory was fucked. But some acid victims—especially nervous mongoloids—have a strange kind of idiot—sapient capacity for remembering odd details and nothing else. It was possible that Lucy might spend two more days in the grip of total amnesia, then snap out of it with no memory of anything but ourroom number at the Flamingo....

I thought about this...but the only alternative was to take her out to the desert and feed her remains to the lizards. I wasn’t ready for this; it seemed a bit heavy for the thing we were trying to protect: My attorney. It came down to that. So the problem was to work out a balance, to aim Lucy in a direction that wouldn’t snap her mind and provoke a disastrous backlash.

She had money. My attorney had ascertained that. “At least $200,” he’d said. “And we can always call the cops up there in Montana, where she lives, and turn her in.” I was reluctant to do this. The only thing worse than turning her loose in Vegas, I felt, was turning her over to “the authorities”...and that was clearly out of the question, anyway. Not now. “What kind of goddamn monster are you?” I said. “First you kidnap the girl, then you rape her, and now you want to have her locked up!” He

shrugged. “It just occurred to me,” he said, “that she has no witnesses. Anything she says about us is completely worthless."

“Us?” I said.

He stared at me. I could see that his head was clearing. The acid was almost gone. This meant that Lucy was probably coming down, too. It was time to cut the cord.

Lucy was waiting for us in the car, listening to the radio with a twisted smile on her face. We were standing about ten yards off. Anybody watching us from a distance might have thought we were having some kind of vicious, showdown argurnent about who had “rights to the girl.” It was a standard scene for a Vegas parking lot.

We finally decided to make her a reservation at the Americana. My attorney ambled over to the car and got her last name under some pretense, then I hurried inside and called the hotel—saying that I was her uncle and that I wanted her to be “treated very gently,” because she was an artist and might seem a trifle high—strung. The room clerk assured me they’d give her every courtesy.

Then we drove her out to the airport, saying we were going to trade the White Whale in for a Mercedes 600, and my attorney took her into the lobby with all her gear. She was still unhinged and babbling when he led her away. I drove around a corner and waited for him.

Ten minutes later he shuffled up to the car and got in. “Take off slowly,” he said. “Don’t attract any attention.” When we got out on Las Vegas Boulevard he explained that he’d given one of the airport cab—hasslers a $10 bill to see that his “drunk girlfriend” got to the Americana, where she had a reservation. “I told him to make sure she got there,” he said.

“You think she will?” He nodded. “The guy said he’d pay the fare with the extra five bucks I gave him, and tell the cabbie to humor her. I told him I had some business to take care of, but I’d be there myself in an hour—and if the girl wasn’t already checked in, I’d come back out here and rip his lungs out."

“That’s good,” I said. “You can’t be subtle in this town.” He grinned. “As your attorney, I advise you to tell me where you put the goddamn mescaline.” I pulled over. The kit—bag was in the trunk. He fetched out two pellets and we each ate one. The sun was going down behind the scrub hills northwest of the city. A good Kristofferson tune was croaking out of

the radio. We cruised back to town through the warm dusk, relaxed on the red leather seats of our electric white Coupe de Ville.

“Maybe we should take it easy tonight,” I said as we flashed past the Tropicana.

“Right,” he said. “Let’s find a good seafood restaurant and some red salmon. I feel a powerful lust for red salmon.” I agreed. “But first we should go back to the hotel and set—in. Maybe have a quick swim and some rum.” He nodded, leaning back on the seat and staring up at the sky. Night was coming down slowly.

4. No Refuge for Degenerates...Reflections on a Muderous Junkie

We drove through the parking lot of the Flamingo and around the back, through the labyrinth, to our wing. No problem with parking, no problem with theelevator, and the suite was dead quiet when we entered: halfdark and peacefully elegant, with big sliding walls opening out on the lawn and the pool.

The only thing moving in the room was the redblinking message light on the telephone. “Probably room service,” I said. “I ordered some ice and booze. I guess it came while we were gone.

My attorney shrugged. “We have plenty,” he said. “But we might as well get more. Hell yes, tell them to send it up.” I picked up the phone and dialed the desk. “What's the mes sage?” I asked. “My light is blinking.” The clerk seemed to hesitate. I could hear papers shuffling. “Ah yes,” he saidfinally. “Mister Duke? Yes, you have two messages. One says, 'Welcome to Las Vegas, from the Na tional District Attorneys' Association.“' “Wonderful,” I said.

“.... and the other,” he continued, “says, 'Call Lucy at the Americana, room 1000.“' 'What?” He repeated the message. There was no mistake.

“Holy shit!” I muttered.

“Excuse me?” said the clerk.

I hung up.

• • •

My attorney was doing the Big Spit again, in the bathroom. I walked out on the balcony and stared at the pool, this kidneyshaped bag of bright water that shimmered outside our suite. I felt like Othello. Here I'd only been in town a few hours, and we'd already laid the groundwork for a classic tragedy. The hero was doomed; he had already sown the seed of his own downfall.

But who was the Hero of this filthy drama? I turned away from the pool and confronted my attorney, now emerging from the bathroom and wiping his mouth with a towel. His eyes were glazed and limpid. “This goddamn mescaline,” he muttered. “Why the fuck can't they make it a little less pure? Maybe mix it up with Rolaids, or something?"

“Othello used Dramamine,” I said.

He nodded, hanging the towel around his neck as he reached out to flip on the TV set. “Yeah, I heard about those remedies. Your man Fatty Arbuckle used olive oil."

“Lucy called,” I said.

“What?” He sagged visibly—like an animal taking a bullet. “I just got the message from the desk. She's at the Americana, room 1600...and she wants us to call.” He stared at me...and just then the phone rang.

I shrugged and picked it up. There was no point trying to hide. She had found us, and that was enough.

“Hello,” I said.

It was the room clerk again.

“Mister Duke?"

“Yes."

“Hello, Mister Duke. I'm sorry we were cut off a moment ago.., but I thought I should call again, because I was won dering . .

“What?” I sensed things closing down on us. This fucker was about to spring something on me. What had that crazy bitch aid to him? I tried to stay calm.

“We're watching the goddamn news!” I screamed. “What the fuck are you interrupting me for?” Silence.

“What do you want? Where's the goddamn ice I ordered? Where's the booze? There's a war on, man! People are being killed!"

“Killed?” He almost whispered the word.

“In Vietnam!” I yelled. “On the goddamn television!"

“Oh...yes...yes,” he said. “This terrible war. When will it end?"

“Tell me,” I said quietly. “What do you want?"

“Of course,” he said, snapping back to his deskclerk tone. “I thought I should tell you...because I know you're here with the Police Convention...that the woman who left that message for you sounded very disturbed.” He hesitated, but I said nothing.

“I thought you should know this,” he said finally.

“What did you say to her?” I asked.

“Nothing. Nothing at all, Mister Duke. I merely took the message.” He paused.

“But it wasn't that easy, talking to that woman. She was...well...extremelynervous. I think she was crying."

“Crying?” My brain had locked up. I couldn't think. The drug was taking over. “Why was she crying?"

“Well...ah...she didn't say, Mister Duke. But since I knew the nature of your work I thought..."

“I know,” I said quickly. “Look, you want to be gentle with that woman if sheever calls again. She's our case study. We're watching her very carefully.” I felt my head unwind ing now; the words came easily: “She's perfectly harmless, of course...there'll be no trouble...this woman has been into laudanum, it's a controlled experiment, but I suspect we'll need your cooperation before this thing is over."

“Well...certainly,” he said. “We're always happy to cooperate with the police...just as long as there won't be any rouble...for us, I mean."

“Don't worry,” I said. “You're protected. Just treat this or woman like you’d treat any other human being in trouble."

“What?” He seemed to be stuttering. “Ah...yes, yes, I see what you meen . . . yes...so you’ll be responsible then?"

“Of course,” I said. “And now I have to get back to the news."

“Thank you,” he muttered.

“Send the ice,” I said, and hung up.

My attorney was smiling peacefully at the TV set. “Good work,” he said. “They'll treat us like goddamn lepers, after that.” I nodded, filling a tall glass with Chivas Regal.

“There hasn't been any news on the tube for three hours,” he said absently.

“That poor fool probably thinks we're plugged into some kind of special cop channel. You should call back and ask him to send up a 3000 watt sensing capacitator, along with the ice. Tell him ours just burned out ..

“You forgot about Lucy,” I said. “She's looking for you.” He laughed. “No, she's looking for you."

“Me?"

“Yeah. She really flipped over you. The only way I could get rid of her, out there in the airport, was by saying you were taking me out to the desert

for a showdown—that you wanted me out of the way so you could have her all to yourself.” He shrugged. “Shit, I had to tell her something. I said she should go to the Americana and wait to see which one of us came back.” He laughed again. “I guess she figures you won. That phone message wasn't for me, was it?” I nodded. It made no sense at all, but I knew it was true. Drug reasoning. The rhythms were brutally clear—and, to him, they made excellent sense.

He was slumped in the chair, concentrating on Mission Im possible.

I thought for a while, then stood up and began stuffing things into my suitcase.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Never mind,” I said. The zipper stuck momentarily, butl yanked it shut. Then I put on my shoes.

“Walt a minute,” he said. “Jesus, you’re not leaving?” I nodded. “You're goddamn right, I'm leaving. But don't worry. I'll stop at the desk on my way out. You'll be taken care of.” He stood up quickly, kicking his drink over. “OK, god damnit, this is serious! Where's my .357?” I shrugged, not looking at him as I crammed the Chivas Regal bottles into my handsatchel. “I sold it in Baker,” I said. “I owe you 35 bucks."

“Jesus Christ!” he shouted. “That thing cost me a hundred and ninety goddamn dollars!” I smiled. “You told me where you got that gun,” I said. “Remember?” He hesitated, pretending to think. “Oh yeah,” he said finally. “Yeah...that punk out in Pasadena .. .” Then he flared again. “So it cost me a goddamn grand. That asshole shot a narc. He was looking at life!...shit, three weeks in court, and all I got was a fucking sixshooter."

“You're stupid,” I said. “I warned you about dealing with junkies on credit—especially when they're guilty. You're lucky the bastard didn't pay you off with a bullet in the stomach.” My attorney sagged. “He was my cousin. The jury found him innocent."

“Shit!” I snapped. “How many people has that junkie bastard shot since we've known him? Six? Eight? That evil little tuck is so guilty that I should probably kill him myself, on general principles. He shot that narc just as sure as he killed that girl at the Holiday Inn...and that guy in Ventura!” He eyed me coldly. “You better be careful, man. You're into some heavy slander.” I laughed, tossing my luggage together in a lump at the foot of the bed while I sat down to finish my drink. I actually intended to leave. I didn't really want to, but I figured that nothing I could possibly do with this gig

was worth the risk of tangled up with Lucy...No doubt she was a beautiful person, if she ever got straight...very sensative, with a secret reserve karma undernenth her Pit Bull act; a great talent with fine instincts...Just a heavy little gal who unfortunately went stone crazy somewhere prior to her eighteenth birthday.

I had nothing personal against her. But I knew she was perfectly capable —under these circumstances—of sending us both to prison for at least twenty years, on the strength of some heinous story we would probably never even hear until she took the stand: “Yessir, those two men over there in the dock are the ones who gave me the LSD and took me to the hotel . .

“And what did they do then, Lucy?"

“Well, sir, I can't rightly remember . .

“Indeed? Well, perhaps this document from the District At torney's files will refresh your memory, Lucy...This is the statement you made to Officer Squane shortly after you were found wandering naked in the desert near Lake Mead."

“I don't know for sure what they done to me, but I remem ber it was horrible. One guy picked me up in the Los Angeles airport; he's the one who gave me the pill...and the other one met us at the hotel; he was sweating real bad and he talked so fast that I couldn't understand what he wanted...No sir, I don't recall exactly what they did to me at that point, because I was still under the influence of that drug...yessir, the LSD they gave me...and I think I was naked for a long time, maybe the whole time they had me there. I think it was evening, because I remember they had the news on. Yessir, Walter Cronkite, I remember his face all through it...” No, I was not ready for this. No jury would doubt her testi mony, especially when it came stuttering out through a fog of tears and obscene acid flashbacks. And the fact that she couldn't recall precisely what we had done to her would make it impossible to deny. The jury would know what we'd done. They would have read about people like us in the $2.95 paper backs: Up To The Hilt and Only Skin Deep, . and seen your type in the $5 fuckflicks.

And of course we could’nt possibly taking the stand in our own defense —not after they'd cleaned out the trunk of the Whale: “And I'd like to point out, Your Honor, that, our Prosecution Exhibits A through Y are available to the jury - yes, this incredible collection of illegal drugs and narcotics which the defendants had in their possession at the time of their arrests and forcible seizure by no less than nine officers, six of whom are still

hospitalized...and also Exhibit Z, sworn testimony by three professional narcotics experts selected by the president of the National District Attorneys' Conference—which was seriously embarrassed by the defendants' attempts to infiltrate, disrupt and pervert their annual convention...these experts have testified that the drug cache in the possession of these defendants at the time of the arrests was enough to kill an entire platoon of United States Marines...and gentlemen, I use the word kill with all due respect for the fear and loathing I'm sure it provokes in every one of you when you reflect that these degenerate rapists used this galaxy of narcotics to completely destroy the mind and morals of this onceinnocent teenager, this ruined and de graded young girl who now sits before you in shame...yes, they fed this girl enough drugs to scramble her brains so hor ribly that she can no longer even recall the filthy details of that orgy she was forced to endure...and then they used her, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, for their own unspeakable ends!"

5. A Terrible Experience with Extremely Dangerous Drugs.

There was no way to cope with it. I stood up and gathered my luggage. It was important, I felt, to get out of town immediately.

My attorney seemed to finally grasp this. “Wait!” he shouted. “You can't leave me alone in this snake pit! This room is in my name.” I shrugged.

“OK, goddamnit,” he said, moving toward the phone.

“Look, I'll call her. I'll get her off our backs.” He nodded.

“You're right. She's my problem.” I shook my head. “No, it's gone too far."

“You'd make a pisspoor lawyer,” he replied. “Relax. I'll handle this.” He dialed the Americana and asked for 1600. “Hi, Lucy,” he said. “Yeah, it's me. I got your message...what? Hell no, I taught the bastard a lesson he'll never forget.., what?...o, not dead, but he won't be bothering anybody for a while—yeah, I left him out there; I stomped him, then pulled all teeth out..

Jesus, I thought. What a terrible thing to lay on somebody a head full of acid.

“But here's the problem,” he was saying. “I have to leave here right away. That bastard cashed a bad check downstairs and gave you as a reference, so they’ll be looking for both of you...yeah, I know, but you can’t judge a book by it’s cover, Lucy; some people are just basically rotten...anyway, the pie as a reference, so they'll be looking for both of us. The last thing in the world you want to do is call this hotel again; they'll

trace the call and put you straight behind bars...no, I'm moving to the Tropicana right away; I'll call you from there when I know my room number...yeah, probably two hours; I have to act casual, or they'll capture me too...I think I'll probably use a different name, but I'll let you know what it is...sure, just as soon as I check in . . . what? of course; we'll go to the CircusCircus and catch the polar bear act; it'll freak you right out . .

He was nervously shifting the phone from ear to ear while he talked: “No . . .listen, I have to get off; they probably have the phone tapped...yeah, I know, it was horrible, but it's all over now... 0 MY GOD! THEY'RE KICKING THEDOOR DOWN!” He hurled the phone down and began shout ing: “No! Get away from me! I'm innocent! It was Duke! I swear to God!” He kicked the phon against the wall, then leaned down to it and began yelling again: “No, I don't know where she is! I think she went back to Montana. You'll never catch Lucy! She's gone!” He kicked the receiver again, then picked it up and held it about a foot away from his mouth as he uttered a long, quavering groan. “No! No! Don't put that thing on me!” he screamed. Then he slammed the phone down.

“Well,” he said quietly. “That's that. She's probably stuffing herself down the incinerator about now.” He smiled. “Yeah, I think that's the last we'll be hearing from Lucy.” I slumped on the bed. His performance had given me a bad jolt. For a moment I thought his mind had snappedthat he actually believed he was being attacked by invisible enemies.

But the room was quiet again. He was back in his chair, watching Mission Impossible and fumbling Idly with the hash pipe. It was empty. “Where's that opium?” he asked.

I tossed him the kitbag. “Be careful,” I mattered. “There's not 'such left.” He chuckled,. “As your attorney,” he said, “I advise you not worry.” He nodded toward the bathroom. “Take a hit out of that little brown bottle in my shaving kit."

“What is it?"

“Adrenochrome,” he said. “You won't need much. Just a little tiny taste.” I got the bottle and dipped the head of a paper match intoit.

“That's about right,” he said. “That stuff makes pure mescaline seem like gingerbeer. You'll go completely crazy if you take too much.” I licked the end of the match. “Where'd you get this?” I asked. “You can't buy it."

“Never mind,” he said. “It's absolutely pure.” I shook my head sadly. “Jesus! What kind of monster client have you picked up this time? There's

only one source for this stuff . .

He nodded.

“The adrenaline glands from a living human body,” I said. “It's no good if youget it out of a corpse."

“I know,” he replied. “But the guy didn't have any cash. He's one of these Satanism freaks. He offered me human blood—said it would make me higher than I'd ever been in my life,” he laughed. “I thought he was kidding, so I told him I'd just as soon have an ounce or so of pure adrenochrome—or maybe just a fresh adrenalin gland to chew on.” I could already feel the stuff working on me. The first wave felt like a combination of mescaline and methedrmne. Maybe I should take a swim, I thought.

“Yeah,” my attorney was saying. “They nailed this guy for child molesting, but he swears he didn't do it. 'Why should I fuck with chi Wren?' he says; 'They're too small!“' He shrugged. “Christ, what could I say? Even a goddamn were wolf is entitled to legal counsel...I didn't dare turn the creep down. He might have picked up a letter opener and gone after my pineal gland."

“Why not?” I said. “He could probably get Melvin Belli for that.” I nodded, barely able to talk now. My body felt like I'd just been wired into a 220 volt socket. “Shit, we should get us some of that stuff.” I muttered finally. “Just eat a big handful and see what happens."

“Some of what?"

“Extract of pineal.” He stared at me. “Sure,” he said. “That's a good idea. One whiff of that shit would turn you into something out of a god damn medical encyclopedia! Man, your head would swell up like a watermelon, you'd probably gain about a hundred pounds in two hours...claws, bleeding warts, then you'd notice about six huge hairy tits swefling up on your back .. .” He shook his head emphatically. “Man, I'll try just about anything; but I'd never in hell touch a pineal gland. “Last Christmas somebody gave me a whole Jimson weed—the root must have wqighed two pound; enough for a year—but I ate the whole goddamn thiung in about twenty minutes.” The slightest hesitation made me want to grab him by the throat and force him to talk faster. “Right!” I said eagerly. “Jimson weed! What happened?"

“Luckily, I vomited most of it right back up,” he said. “But even so, I went blind for three days. Christ I couldn't even walk! My whole body turned to wax. I was such a mess that they had to haul me back to the ranch

house in a wheelbarrow...they said I was trying to talk, but I sounded like a raccoon."

“Fantastic,” I said. But I could barely hear him. I was so wired that my hands were clawing uncontrollably at the bed spread, jerking it right out from under me while he talked. My heels were dug into the mattress, with both knees locked ... I could feel my eyeballs swelling, about to pop out of the sockets.

“Finish the fucking story!” I snarled. “What happened? What about the glands?” He backed away, keeping an eye on me as he edged across the room. “Maybe you need another drink,” he said nervously. “Jesus, that stuff got right on top of you, didn't it?” I tried to smile. “Well...nothing worse .. . no, this is worse .. .” It was hard to move my jaws; my tongue felt like burning magnesium. “No...nothing to worry about,” I hissed. “Maybe if you could just...shove me into the pool, or something..

“Goddamnit,” he said. “You took too much. You're about to ~plode. Jesus, look at your face!' I couldn't move. Total paralysis now. Every muscle in my was contracted. I couldn't even move my eyeballs, much turn my head or talk.

“It won't last long,” he said. “The first rush is the worst. ride the bastard out. If I put you in the pool right now, sink like a goddamn stone.” I was sure of it. Not even my lungs seemed to be functioning. I needed artificial respiration, but I couldn't open my mouth to say so. I was going to die. Just sitting there on the bed, unable to move...well at least there’s no pain.

Probably, I'll black out in a few seconds, and after that it won't matter.

My attorney had gone back to watching television. The news was on again. Nixon's face filled the screen, but his speech was hopelessly garbled. The only word I could make out was “sacrifice.” Over and over again: “Sacrifice...sacrifice ... sacrificeI could hear myself breathing heavily. My attorney seemed to notice. “Just stay relaxed,” he said over his shoulder, with out looking at me. “Don't try to fight it, or you'll start getting brain bubbles...strokes, aneurisms...you'll just wither up and die.” His hand snaked out to change channels.

It was after midnight when I finally was able to talk and move around...but I was still not free of the drug; the voltage had merely been cranked down from 220 to 110. I was a babbling nervous wreck, flapping around the room like a wild animal, pouring sweat and unable to

concentrate on any one thought for more than two or three seconds at a time.

My attorney put down the phone after making several calls. “There's only one place where we can get fresh salmon,” he said, “and it's closed on Sunday."

“Of course,” I snapped. “These goddamn Jesus freaks! They're multiplying like rats!” He eyed me curiously.

“What about the Process?” I said. “Don't they have a place here? Maybe a delicatessen or something? With a few tables in back? They have a fantastic menu in London. I ate there once; incredible food “

“Get a grip on yourself,” he said. “You don't want to even mention the Process in this town."

“You're right,” I said. “Call Inspector Bloor. He knows about food. I think he has a list."

“Better to call room service,” he said. “We can get the crab looey and a quart of Christian Brothers muscatel for about twenty bucks.

“No!” I said. “We must get out of this place. I need air. Let's drive up to Reno and get a big tuna fish salad...hell, it won't take long. Only about four hundred miles; no traffic out there on the desert..."

“Forget it,” he said. “That's Army territory. Bomb tests, nerve gas—we'd never make it.” We wound up at a place called The Big Flip about halfway downtown. I had a “New York steak” for $1.88. My attorney ordered the “Coyote Bush Basket” for $2.09 . . . and after that we drank off a pot of watery “Golden West” coffee and watched four boozedup cowboy types kick a faggot half to death between the pinball machines.

“The action never stops in this town,” said my attorney as we shuffled out to the car. “A man with the right contacts could probably pick up all the fresh adrenochrome he wanted, if he hung around here for a while.” I agreed, but I wasn't quite up to it, right then. I hadn't slept for something like eighty hours, and that fearful ordeal with the drug had left me completely exhausted...tomorrow we would have to get serious. The drug conference was scheduled to kick off at noon...and we were still not sure how to handle it. So we drove back to the hotel and watched a British horror film on the late show.

6. Getting Down to Business...Opening Day at the Drug Convention

“On behalf of the prosecuting attorneys of this county, I welcome you.” We sat in the rear fringe of a crowd of about 1500 in the main ballroom of

the Dunes Hotel. Far up in front of the room, barely visible from the rear, the executive director of the National District Attorneys' Association—a middleaged, wellgroomed, successful GOP businessman type named Pat rick Healywas opening their Third National Institute on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. His remarks reached us by way of a big, lowfidelity speaker mounted on a steel pole in our corner. Perhaps a dozen others were spotted around the room, all facing the rear and looming over the crowd...so hat no matter where you sat or even tried to hide, you were ways looking down the muzzle of a big speaker.

This produced an odd effect. People in each section of the Lroom tended to stare at the nearest voicebox, instead of watching the distant figure of whoever was actually talking up front, on the podium. This 1935 style of speaker placement totally depersonalized the room. There was something is and authoritarian about it.

Whoever set up that system was probably some kind of Sheriff's auxiliary technician on leave from a drivein theater in Muskogee, where the management couldn't afford individual car speakers and relied on ten huge horns, mounted ontelephone poles in the parking area. A year earlier I had been to the Sky River Rock Festival in rural Washington, where a dozen stonebroke freaks from the Seattle Liberation Front had assembled a sound sys tem that carried every small note of an acoustic guitar—even a cough or the sound of a boot dropping on the stage—to half—deaf acid victims huddled under bushes a half mile away.

But the best technicians available to the National DAs' convention in Vegas apparently couldn't handle it. Their sound system looked like something Ulysses S. Grant might have triggered up to address his troops during the Seige of Vicksburg. The voices from up front crackled with a fuzzy, highpitched urgency, and the delay was just enough to keep the words disconcertingly out of phase with the speaker's ges tures.

“We must come to terms with the Drug Culture in this country!...country . . . country ...” These echoes drifted back to the rear in confused waves. “The reefer butt is called a 'roach' because it resembles a cockroach ...cockroach ... cockroach ..

“What the fuck are these people talking about?” my attorney whispered. “You'd have to be crazy on acid to think a joint looked like a goddamn cockroach!” I shrugged. It was clear that we'd stumbled into a prehis toric gathering. The voice of a “drug expert” named Bloomquist crackled out of

the nearby speakers: “. .. about these flashbacks, the patient never knows; he thinks it's all over and he gets himself straightened out for six months...and then, darn it, the whole trip comes back on him.” Gosh darn that fiendish LSD! Dr. E. R. Bloomquist, MD, was the keynote speaker, one of the big stars of the conference. He is the author of a paperback book titled Marijuana, which—according to the cover—“tells it like it is.” (He is also the inventor of the roach/cockroach thoery...) According to the book jacket, he is an “Associate Clinical Professor of Surgery (Anesthesiology) at the University of Southern Cllfcruia School of Medicine” . . . and also “a well known authority on the abuseof dangerous drugs.: Dr. Bllomquist “has also appeared on national network television panles, has served as a consultant for government agencies, was a member of the Committee on Narcotics Addiction and Alcoholism of the Council on Mental Health of the American Medical Association.” His wisdom is massively reprinted and distributed, says the publisher. He is clearly one of the heavies on that circuit of secondrate academic hustlers who get paid anywhere from $500 to $1000 a hit for lecturing to cop crowds. Dr. Bloomquist's book is a compendium of state bullshit. On page 49 he explains, the “four states of being” in the cannabis society: “Cool, Groovy, Hip & Square” - in that descending order. “The square is seldom if ever cool,” says Bloomquist. “He is 'not with it,' that is, he doesn't know 'what's happening.' But if he manages to figure it out, he moves up a notch to 'hip.' And if he can bring himself to approve of what's happening, he becomes 'groovy.' And after that, with much luck and perseverence, he can rise to the rank of 'cool.“' Bloomquist writes like somebody who once bearded Tim Leary in a campus cocktail lounge and paid for all the drinks. And it was probably somebody like Leary who told him, with a straight face, that sunglasses are known in the drug culture as “tea shades.” This is the kind of dangerous gibberish that used to be posted, in the form of mimeographed bulletins, in Police Department locker rooms.

Indeed: KNOW YOUR DOPE FIEND. YOUR LIFE MAY DEPEND ON IT! You will not be able to see his eyes because of TeaShades, but his knuckles will be white from inner tension and his pants will be crustedwith semen from constantly jacking off when he can't find a rape victim. He will staggerr and babble when questioned. He will not respect your badge. The Dope Fiend fears nothing. He will attack, for no reason, with every weapon at his command—includtng yours. BEWARE. Any officer apprehending a

suspected marijuana addict should use all necessary force immedately. One stitch in time (on him) wil usually save nine on you. Good luck.

The Chief.

Indeed. Luck is always important, especially in Las Vegas...and ours was getting worse. It was clear at a glance that this Drug Conference was not what we'd planned on. It was far too open, too mixed. About a third of the crowd looked like they'd just stopped by, for the show, en route to a FrazierAli rematch at the Vegas Convention Center across town. Or maybe a benefit bout, for Old Smack Dealers, between Liston and Marshal Ky.

The room fairly bristled with beards, mustaches and super- Mod dress. The DAs' conference had obviously drawn a goodly contingent of undercover narcs and other twilight types. An assistant DA from Chicago wore a lighttan sleeve less knit suit: His lady was the star of the Dunes casino; she flashed through the place like Grace Slick at a Finch College class reunion. They were a classic couple; stone swingers.

Just because you're a cop, these days, doesn't mean you can't be With It. And this conference attracted some real peacocks. But my own costume—$40 FBI wingtips and a Pat Boone madras sportcoat—was just about right for the mass median; because for every urbanhipster, there were about twenty crudelooking rednecks who could have passed for assistant football coaches at Mississippi State.

These were the people who made my attorney nervous. Like most Californians, he was shocked to actually see these people from The Outback. Here was the copcream from Middle America...and, Jesus, they looked and talked like a gang of drunken pig farmers!

I tried to console him. “They're actually nice people,” I said, “once you get to know them.” He smiled: “Know them? Are you kidding? Man, I know these people in my goddamn blood!"

“Don't mention that word around here,” I said. “You'll get them excited.” He nodded. “You're right. I saw these bastards in Easy Rider, but I didn't believe they were real. Not like this. Not hundreds of them!” My attorney was wearing a duoblebreasted blue pinstripe suit, a far more stylish outfit than my own.., but it made him exceedingly nervous. Because to be stylishly dressed in this crowd meant that you were probably an undercover cop, and my attorney makes his living with people who are very sensitive in that area. “This is a fucking nightmare!” he kept muttering.

“Here I am infiltrating a goddamn Pig confer ence, but sure as hell there's some dopedealing bomb freak in this town who's going to recognize me and put the word out that I'm out here partying with a thousand cops!' We all wore name tags. They came with the $100 “registra tion fee.” Mine said I was a “private investigator” from L.A.—which was true, in a sense; and my attorney's nametag identified him as an expert in “Criminal Drug Analysis.” Which was also true, in a sense.

But nobody seemed to care who was what, or why. Security was too loose for that kind of gritty paranoia. But we were also a bit tense because we'd given the registrar a bad check for our dual registration fee. It was a check from one of my attorney's pimp/drug underworld clients that he assumed, from long experience, was absolutely worthless.

7. If You Don’t Know, Come To Learn...If You Know, Come To Teach

The first session—the opening remarks—lasted most of the afternoon. We sat patiently through the first two hours, al though it was clear from the start that we weren't going to Learn anything and it was equally clear that we'd be crazy to try any Teaching. It was easy enough to sit there with a head full of mescaline and listen to hour after hour of irrelevant gibberish... There was certainly no risk involved. These poor bastards didn't know mescaline from macaroni.

I suspect we could have done the whole thing on acid... for some of the people; there were faces and bodies in that group who would have been absolutely unendurable on acid. The sight of a 344-pound police chief from Waco, Texas, necking openly with his 290-pound wife (or whatever woman he had with him) when the lights were turned off for a Dope Film was just barely tolerable on mescalinewhich is mainly sensual/surface drug that exaggerates reality, instead of altering it—but with head full of acid, the sight of two fantastically obese human beings far gone in a public grope while a thousand cops all around them watched a movie about of the “dangers of marijuana” would not be emotionally acceptable. The brain would reject it: The medulla would attempt to close itself off from the signals it was getting from the frontal lobes... and the middlebrain, meanwhile, would be trying desperately to put a different interpretation on the scene, before passing it back to the medulla and the risk of physical action.

Acid is a relatively complex drug, in its effects, while mesca line is pretty simple and straightforward—but in a scene like this, the difference

was academic. There was simply no call, at this conference, for anything but a massive consumption of Downers: Reds, Grass and Booze, because the whole program had apparently been set up by people who had been in a Seconal stupor since 1964.

Here were more than a thousand toplevel cops telling each other “we must come to terms with the drug culture,” but they had no idea where to start. They couldn't even find the goddamn thing. There were rumors in the hallways that maybe the Mafia was behind it. Or perhaps the Beatles. At one point somebody in the audience asked Bboomquist if he thought Margaret Mead's “strange behavior,” of late, might possibly be explained by a private marijuana addiction.

“I really don't know,” Bboomquist replied. “But at her age, if she did smoke grass, she'd have one hell of a trip.” The audience roared with laughter at this remark.

My attorney leaned over to whisper that he was leaving. “I'll be down in the casino,” he said. “I know a hell of a lot better ways to waste my time than listening to this bullshit.” He stood up, knocking his ashtray off the arm of his chair, and plunged down the aisle toward the door.

The seats were not arranged for random movement. People tried to make a path for him, but there was no room to move.

“Watch yourself!” somebody shouted as he bulled over them.

“Fuck you!” he snarled.

“Down in front!” somebody else yelled.

By now he was almost to the door. “I have to get out!” he shouted.. “I don’t belong here!"

“Good riddance,” said a voice.

He paused, looking around—then he seemed to think better of it, and kept moving. By the time he got to the exit the whole rear of the room was in turmoil. Even Bloomquist, far up front on the stage, seemed aware of a distant trouble. He stopped talking and peered nervously in the direction of the noise. Probably he thought a brawl had erupted—maybe a racial conflict of some kind, something that couldn't be helped.

I stood up and plunged toward the door. It seemed like as good a time as any to flee. “Pardon me, I feel sick,” I said to the first leg I stepped on. It jerked back, and I said it again: “Sorry, I'm about to be sick...sorry, sick.., beg pardon, yes, feeling sick ... This time a path opened very nicely. Not a word of protest. Hands actually helped me along. They feared I was about

to vomit, and nobody wanted it—at least not on them. I made it to the door in about fortyfive seconds.

My attorney was downstairs at the bar, talking to a sporty—looking cop about forty whose plastic name—tag said he was the DA from someplace in Georgia. “I'm a whiskey man, myself,” he was saying. “We don't have much problem with drugs down where I come from."

“You will,” said my attorney. “One of these nights you'll wake up and find a junkie tearing your bedroom apart."

“Naw!” said the Georgia man. “Not down in my parts.” I joined them and ordered a tall glass of rum, with ice.

“You're another one of these California boys,” he said. Your friend here's been tellin' me about dope fiends."

“They're everywhere,” I said. “Nobody's safe. And sure as not in the South. They like the warm weather.” They work in pairs,” said my attorney. “Sometimes in gangs. They'll climb right into your bedroom and sit on your chest, with big Bowie knives.” He nodded solemniy. '“They might even sit your wife’s chest—put the blade right down on her throat."

“Jesus god almighty,"

“said the southerner. “What the hell's goin’ on in this country?"

“You'd never believe it,” said my attorney. “In L.A. it's out of control. First it was drugs, now it's witchcraft."

“Witchcraft? Shit, you can't mean it!"

“Read the newspapers,” I said. “Man, you don't know trouble until you have to face down a bunch of these addicts gone crazy for human sacrifice!"

“Naw!” he said. “That's science fiction stuff!"

“Not where we operate,” said my attorney. “Hell, in Malibu alone, these goddamn Satanworshippers kill six or eight people every day.” He paused to sip his drink. “And all they want is the blood,” he continued. “They'll take people right off the street if they have to.” He nodded. “Hell, yes. Just the other day we had a case where they grabbed a girl right out of a McDonald's hamburger stand. She was a waitress. About six teen years old...with a lot of people watching, too!"

“What happened?” said our friend. “What did they do to her?” He seemed very agitated by what he was hearing.

“Do?” said my attorney. “Jesus Christ man. They chopped her goddamn head off right there in the parking lot! Then they cut all kinds of holes in her and sucked out the blood!"

“God almighty!” The Georgia man exclaimed...“And nobody did anything?"

“What could they do?” I said. “The guy that took the head was about sixseven and maybe three hundred pounds. He was packing two Lugers, and the others had M-16s. They were all veterans. “

“The big guy used to be a major in the Marines,” said my attorney. “We know where he lives, but we can't get near the house."

“Naw!” our friend shouted. “Not a major!"

“He wanted the pineal gland,” I said. “That's how he got so big. When he quit the Marines he was just a little guy."

“0 my god!” said our friend. “That's horrible!"

“It happens every day,” said my attorney. “Usually it's whole families. During the night. Most of them don't even wake up until they feel their heads going—and then, of course, it's too late.” The bartender had stopped to listen. I'd been watching him. His expression was not calm.

“Three more rums,” I said. “With plenty of ice, and maybe a handful of lime chunks.” He nodded, but I could see that his mind was not on his work. He was staring at our nametags. “Are you guys with that police convention upstairs?” he said finally.

“We sure are, my friend,” said the Georgia man with a big smile.

The bartender shook his head sadly. “I thought so,” he said. “I never heard that kind of talk at this bar before. Jesus Christ! How do you guys stand that kind of work?” My attorney smiled at him. “We like it,” he said. “It's groovy.” The bartender drew back; his face was a mask of repug nance.

“What's wrong with you?” I said. “Hell, somebody has to do it.” He stared at me for a moment, then turned away.

“Hurry up with those drinks,” said my attorney. “We're thirsty.” He laughed and rolled his eyes as the bartender glanced back at him. “Only two rums,” he said. “Make mine a Bloody Mary.” The bartender seemed to stiffen, but our Georgia friend didn't notice. His mind was somewhere else. “Hell, I really hate to hear this,” he said quietly. “Because everything that happens in California seems to get down our way, sooner or later. Mostly Atlanta, but I guess that was back when the goddamn bastards were peaceful. It used to be that all we had to do was keep 'em under surveillance. They didn't roam around much....” He shrugged. “But now, Jesus, nobody's safe. They could turn up anywhere."

“You're right,” said my attorney. “We learned that in California. You remember where Manson turned up, don't you? Right out in the middle of Death Valley. He had a whole army of sex fiends out there. We only got our hands on a few.

Most of the crew got away; just ran off across the sand dimes, like big lizards ... and every one of them stark naked, except for the weapons.” ‘They’ll turn up everwhere, pretty soon.” OI said. “And let’s hope we'll be ready for them.” The Georgia man whacked his fist on the bar. “But we can't just lock ourselves in the house and be prisoners!” he ex aimed. “We don't even know who these people are! How do you recognize them?

“You can't,” my attorney replied. “The only way to do it is to take the bull by the horns—go to the mat with this scum!"

“What do you mean by that?” he asked.

“You know what I mean,” said my attorney. “We've done it before, and we can damn well do it again."

“Cut their goddamn heads off,” I said. “Every one of them. That's what we're doing in California."

“What?"

“Sure,” said my attorney. “It's all on the Q.T., but everybody who matters is with us all the way down the line."

“God! I had no idea it was that bad out there!” said our friend.

“We keep it quiet,” I said. “It's not the kind of thing you'd to talk about upstairs, for instance. Not with the press around.” Our man agreed. “Hell no!” he said. “We'd never hear the ~goddamn end of it."

“Dobermans don't talk,” I said.

“What?"

“Sometimes it's easier to just rip out the backstraps,” said attorney.

“They'll fight like hell if you try to take the I without dogs."

“God almighty!” We left him at the bar, swirling the ice in his drink and not smiling. He was worried about whether or not to tell his wife It it. “She'd never understand,” he muttered. “You know women are.” I nodded. My attorney was already gone, scurrying through of slot machines toward the front door. I said goodbye end, warning him not to say anything about what him.

8. Back Door Beauty...& Finally a Bit of Serious Drag Racing on the Strip

Sometime around midnight my attorney wanted coffee. He bad been vomiting fairly regularly as we drove around the Strip, and the right flank of the Whale was badly streaked. We were idling at a stoplight in front of the Silver Slipper beside a big blue Ford with Oklahoma plates...two hoggish- looking couples in the car, probably cops from Muskogee using the Drug Conference to give their wives a look at Vegas. They looked like they'd just beaten Caesar's Palace for about $38 at the blackjack tables, and now they were headed for the CircusCircus to whoop it up....but suddenly, they found themselves next to a white Cadillac convertible all covered with vomit and a 300-pound Samoan in a yellow fishnet Tshirt yelling at them: “Hey there! You folks want to buy some heroin?” No reply. No sign of recognition. They'd been warned about this kind of crap: Just ignore it...

'Hey, honkies!” my attorney screamed. “Goddamnit, I'm serious! I want to sell you some pure fuckin' smack!” He was hanging out of the car, very close to them. But still nobody an swered. I glanced over, very briefly, and saw four middle Americanan faces frozen with shock, staring straight ahead.

We were in the middle lane. A quick left turn would be ille would have to go straight ahead when the light en escape at the next corner. I waited, tapping the accelerator nervously...

My attorney was losing control: “Cheap heroin!” he was shouting. “This is the real stuff You won’t get hooked! God damnit, I know what I have here!” He whacked on the side of the car, as if to get their attention.., but they wanted no part of us.

“You folks never talked to a vet before?” said my attorney. “I just got back from Veet Naam. This is scag, folks! Pure scag!” Suddenly the light changed and the Ford bolted off like a rocket. I stomped on the accelerator and stayed right next to them for about two hundred yards, watching for cops in the mirror while my attorney kept screaming at them: “Shoot! Fuck! Scag! Blood! Heroin! Rape! Cheap! Communist! Jab it right into your fucking eyeballs!” We were approaching the CircusCircus at high speed and the Oklahoma car was veering left, trying to muscle into the turn lane. I stomped the Whale into passing gear and we ran fender to fender for a moment. He wasn't up to hitting me; there was horror in his eyes.

The man in the back seat lost control of himself...lunging across his wife and snarling wildly: “You dirty bastards! Pull over and I'll kill you! God damn you! You bas tards!” He seemed ready to leap out the window

and into our car, crazy with rage. Luckily the Ford was a twodoor. He couldn't get out.

We were coming up to the next stoplight and the Ford was still trying to move left. We were both running full bore. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that we'd left the other traffic far behind; there was a big opening to the right. So I mashed on the brake, hurling my attorney against the dash board, and in the instant the Ford surged ahead I cut across his tail and zoomed into a sidestreet. A sharp right turn across three lanes of traffic. But it worked. We left the Ford stalled in the middle of the intersection, hung in the middle of a screeching left turn. With a little luck, he'd be arrested for reckless driving.

My attorney was laughing as we careened in low gear, with the light sout, through a dusty tangle of backstreets behind the Desert Inn. “Jesus Christ,” he said. “Those Okies were getting excited. That guy in the back seat was trying to bite me! Shit, he was frothing at the mouth.” He nodded solemnly. “I should have maced the fucker...a criminal psychotic, total breakdown...you never know when they're likely to explode.” I swung the Whale into a turn that seemed to lead out of the maze—but instead of skidding, the bastard almost rolled.

“Holy shit!” my attorney screamed. “Turn on the fucking lights!” He was clinging to the top of the windshield...and suddenly he was doing the Big Spit again, leaning over the side.

I refused to slow down until I was sure nobody was following us—especially that Oklahoma Ford: those people were definitely dangerous, at least until they calmed down. Would they report that terrible quick encounter to the police? Probably not. It had happened too fast, with no witnesses, and the I were pretty good that nobody would believe them anyway. The idea that two heroin pushers in a white Cadillac convertible would be dragging up and down the Strip, abusing total strangers at stoplights, was prima facie absurd. Not even Sonny Liston ever got that far out of control.

We made another turn and almost rolled again. The Coupe de Ville is not your ideal machine for high speed cornering in residential neighborhoods. The handling is very mushy...unlike the Red Shark, which had responded very nicely to situations requiring the quick fourwheel drift. But the Whale Bad of cutting loose at the critical moment—had a tendency to dig in, which accounted for that sickening “here we go' sensation.

At first I thought it was only because the tires were soft, so I took it into the Texaco station next to the Flamingo and had the tires pumped up to fifty pounds each—which alarmed the attendant, until I explained that these were “experimental” tires.

But fifty pounds each didn't help the cornering, so I swent back a few hours later and told him I wanted to try seventy five. He shook his head nervously. “Not me,” he said, handing me the air hgose. “Here. They’re your tires. You do it."

“What's wrong?” I asked. “You think they can't take seventyfive?” He nodded, moving away as I stooped to deal with the left front. “You’re damn right,” he said. “Those tires want twenty eight in the front and thirty two in the rear. Hell, fifty’s dangerous, but seventy five is crazy. They’ll explode!” I shook my head and kept filling the left front. “I told you,” I said, “Sandoz laboratories designed these tires. They're special. I could load them up to a hundred.

“God almighty!” he groaned. “Don't do that here."

“Not today,” I replied. “I want to see how they corner with seventyfive.” He chuckled. “You won't even get to the corner, Mister."

“We'll see,” I said, moving around to the rear with the air- hose. In truth, I was nervous. The two front ones were tighter than snare drums; they felt like teak wood when I tapped on them with the rod. But what the hell? I thought. If they ex plode, so what? It's not often that a man gets a chance to run terminal experiments on a virgin Cadillac and four brand- new $80 tires. For all I knew, the thing might start cornering like a Lotus Elan. If not, all I had to do was call the VIP agency and have another one delivered...maybe threaten them with a lawsuit because all four tires had exploded on me, while driving in heavy traffic. Demand an Eldorado, next time, with four Michelin Xs. And put it all on the card...charge it to the St Louis Browns.

As it turned out, the Whale behaved very nicely with the altered tire pressures. The ride was a trifle rough; I could feel every pebble on the highway, like being on roller skates in a gravel pit.., but the thing began cornering in a very stylish manner, very much like driving a motorcycle at top speed in a hard rain: one slip and ZANG, over the high side, cartwheel ing across the landscape with your head in your hands.

• • •

About thirty minutes after our brush with the Okies we pulled into an allnight diner on the Tonopah highway, on the kirts of a mean/scag ghetto called “North Las Vegas.” Which is actually outside the city limits of Vegas proper. North Vegas is where you go when you've fucked up once too often on the Strip, and when you're not even welcome in the cutrate downtown places around Casino Center.

This is Nevada's answer to East St. Louis—a slum and a graveyard, last stop before permanent exile to Ely or Winnemuca. North Vegas is where you go if you're a hooker turning thirty and the syndicate men on the Strip decide you're no longer much good for business out there with the high rollers .. . or if you're a pimp with bad credit at the Sands...or what they still call, in Vegas, “a hophead.” This can mean almost anything from a mean drunk to a junkie, but in terms of commercial acceptability, it means you're finished all the right places.

The big hotels and casinos pay a lot of muscle to make sure high rollers don't have even momentary hassles with “undesirables.” Security in a place like Caesar's Palace is super tense and strict. Probably a third of the people on the floor at given time are either shills or watchdogs. Public drunks known pickpockets are dealt with instantly—hustled out parking lot by Secret Service type thugs and given a impersonal lecture about the cost of dental work and of trying to make a living with two broken erms.

The “high side” of Vegas is probably the most closed society west of Sicily—and it makes no difference, in terms of the lay lifestyle of the place, whether the Man at the Top is Lucky Luciano or Howard Hughes. In an economy where Tom Jones can make $75,000 a week for two shows a night at Caeser’s, the palace guard is indispensable, and they don't care who signs their paychecks. A gold mine like Vegas breeds it’s own army, like any other gold mine. Hired muscle tends to accumulate in fast layers around money/power poles...and big money, in Vegas, is synonymous with the Power to protect it.

So once you get blacklisted on the Strip, for any reason at all, you either get out of town or retire to nurse your act along, on the cheap, in the shoddy limbo of North Vegas...out there with the gunsels, the hustlers, the drug cripples and all the other losers. North Vegas, for instance, is where you go if you need to score smack before midnight with no refer ences.

But if you're looking for cocaine, and you're ready up front with some bills and the proper code words, you want to stay on the Strip and get next

to a wellconnected hooker, which will take at least one bill for starters.

And so much for all that. We didn't fit the mold. There is no formula for finding yourself in Vegas with a white Cadillac full of drugs and nothing to mix with properly. The Fillmore style never quite caught on here. People like Sinatra and Dean Martin are still considered “far out” in Vegas. The “underground newspaper” here—the Las Vegas Free Press—is a cautious echo of The People's World, or maybe the National Guardian.

A week in Vegas is like stumbling into a Time Warp, a regression to the late fifties. Which is wholly understandable when you see the people who come here, the Big Spenders from places like Denver and Dallas. Along with National Elks Club conventions (no niggers allowed) and the AllWest Volunteer Sheepherders' Rally. These are people who go abso lutely crazy at the sight of an old hooker stripping down to her pasties and prancing out on the runway to the bigbeat sound of a dozen 50-yearold junkies kicking out the jams on “September Song."

It was some time around three when we pulled into the parking lot of the North Vegas diner. I was looking for a copy of the Los Angeles Times, for news of the outside world, but a quick glance at the newspaper racks amde a bad joke of that notion. They don't need the Times in North Vegas. No news is good news.

“Fuck newspapers,” said my attorney. “What we need now is coffee.” I agreed, but I stole a copy of the Vegas Sun anyway. It yesterday's edition, but I didn't care. The idea of entering a coffee shop without a newspaper in my hands made me nervous. There was always the Sports Section; get wired on baseball scores and profootball rumors: “Bart Starr Beaten by Thugs in Chicago Tavern; Packers Seek Trade”...”Namath Quits Jets to be Governor of Alabama” ... and a speculative piece on page 46 about a rookie sensation Harrison Fire, out of Grambling: runs the hundred in nine flat, 344 pounds and still growing.

“This man Fire has definite promise,” says the coach. “Yesterday, before practice, he destroyed a Greyhound Bus with bare hands, and last night he killed a subway. He's a natural for color TV. I'm not one to play favorites, but it looks like i'll have to make room for him.” Indeed. There is always room on TV for a man who can beat people to jelly in nine flat...But not many of these gathered, on this night, in the North Star Coffee Lounge. We had the place to ourselves—which proved to be fortunate, because we'd

eaten two more pellets of mescaline on way over, and the effects were beginning to manifest.

My attorney was no longer vomiting, or even acting sick. He ordered coffee with the authority of a man long accustmed to quick service. The waitress had the appearance of a hooker who had finally found her place in life. She was definitely in charge here, and she eyed us with obvious disapproval as we settled onto our stools.

I was’nt paying much attention. The North Star Coffee Lounge seemed like a fairly safe haven from our storms. There are some you go into—in this line of work—that you know will be heavy. The details don't matter. All you know, for sure, is that your brain starts humming with brutal vibes as you approach the front door. Something wild and evil is about to happen; and it's going to involve you.

But there was nothing in the atmosphere of the North Star to put me on my guard. The waitress was passively hostile, but I was accustomed to that. She was a big woman. Not fat, but large in every way, long sinewy arms and a brawler's jawbone. A burnedout caricature of Jane Russell: big head of dark hair, face slashed with lipstick and a 48 DoubleE chest that was probably spectacular about twenty years ago when she might have been a Mama for the Hell's Angels chapter in Berdoo...but now she was strapped up in a giant pink elastic brassiere that showed like a bandage through the sweaty white rayon of her uniform.

Probably she was married to somebody, but I didn't feel like speculating. All I wanted from her, tonight, was a cup of black coffee and a 29 cent hamburger with pickles and onions. No hassles, no talk—just a place to rest and re—group. I wasn't even hungry.

My attorney had no newspaper or anything else to compel his attention. So he focused, out of boredom, on the waitress. She was taking our orders like a robot when he punched through her crust with a demand for “two glasses of ice water—with ice.” My attorney drank his in one long gulp, then asked for an other. I noticed that the waitress seemed tense.

Fuck it, I thought. I was reading the funnies.

About ten minutes later, when she brought the hamburg ers, I saw my attorney hand her a napkin with something printed on it. He did it very casually, with no expression at all on his face. But I knew, from the vibes, that our peace was about to be shattered.

“What was that?” I asked him.

He shrugged, smiling vaguely at the waitress who was standing about ten feet away, at the end of the counter, keeping her back to us while she pondered the napkin. Finally she turned and stared...then she stepped resolutely forward and tossed the napkin at my attorney.

“What is this?” she snapped.

“A napkin,” said my attorney.

There was a moment of nasty silence, then she began screaming: “Don't give me that bullshit! I know what it is! You goddamn fat pimp bastard!” My attorney picked up the napkin, looked at what he'd written, then dropped it back on the counter. “That's the name of a horse I used to own,” he said calmly. “What's wrong with you?"

“You sonofabitch!” she screamed. “I take a lot of shit in place, but I sure as hell don't have to take it off a spic pimp!” Jesus! I thought. What's happening? I was watching the woman’s hands, hoping she wouldn't pick up anything sharp and heavy. I picked up the napkin and read what the bastard printed on it, in careful red letters: “Back Door Beauty?” The question mark was emphasized.

The woman was screaming again: “Pay your bill and get hell out! You want me to call the cops?” I reached for my wallet, but my attorney was already on feet, never taking his eyes off the woman...then he reached under his shirt, not into his pocket, coming up suddenly with the Gerber MiniMagnum, a nasty silver blade the the waitress seemed to understand instantly.

She froze: her eyes fixed wildly on the blade. My attorney, watching her, moved about six feet down the aisle and the receiver off the hook of the pay phone. He sliced it off, then brought the receiver back to his stool and sat down.

The waitress didn't move. I was stupid with shock, not whether to run or start laughing.

“How much is that lemon meringue pie?” my attorney’s voice was casual, as if he had just wandered into and was debating what to order.

“Thirty five cents!” the woman blurted. Her eyes were turgid with fear but her brain was apparently functioning on some basic motor survival leveL My attorney laughed. “I mean the whole pie,” he said.

She moaned.

My attorney put a bill on the counter. “Let's say it's five dollars,” he said. “OK?” She nodded, still frozen, watching my attorney as he walked

around the counter and got the pie out of the display case. I prepared to leave.

The waitress was clearly in shock. The sight of the blade, jerked out in the heat of an argument, had apparently triggered bad memories. The glazed look in her eyes said her throat had been cut. She was still in the grip of paralysis when we left.

9. Breakdown on Paradice Blvd.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At this point in the chronology, Dr. Duke appears to have broken down completely; the original manuscript is so splintered that we were forced to seek out the original tape record ing and transcribe it verbatim. We made no attempt to edit this section, and Dr. Duke refused even to read it. There was only one way to reach him. The only address/contact we had, during this period, was a mobile phone unit somewhere on Highway 61—and all efforts to reach Duke at that number proved futile. In the interests of journalistic purity, we are publishing the following section just as it came off the tape—one of many that Duke submitted for purposes of verification—along with manuscript. According to the tape, this section follows an episode involving Duke, his attorney and a waitress at an all—diner in North Vegas. The rationale for the following section appears to be based on a feeling—shared by both Duke and his attorney - that the American Dream would to be sought out somewhere far beyond the dreary confines District Attorneys' Confrrence on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

The transcription begins somewhere on the Northeast out of Las Vegas —zooming along Paradise Road in the White Whale...

Att’y: Boulder City is to the right. Is that a town?

Duke: Yeah Att’y: Let’s go to Boulder City.

Duke: All right. Let’s get some coffee somewhere...

Att'y: Right up here, Terry's Taco Stand, USA. I could go for a taco. Five for a buck.

Duke: Sounds horrible. I'd rather go somewhere where's there's one for 5O cents.

Att'y: No...this might be the last chance we get for tacos.

Duke:... I need some coffee.

Att'y: I want tacos Duke: Five for a buck, that's like...five hamburgers for a buck.

Att'y: No...don't judge a taco by its price.

Duke: You think you might make a deal?

Att'y: I might. There's a hamburger for 29 cents. Tacos are 29 cents. It's just a cheap place, that's all.

Duke: Go bargain with them..

[Only garbled sounds here.-Ed.] Att'y:... Hello.

Waitress: May I help you?

Att'y: Yeah, you have tacos here? Are they Mexican tacos or just regular tacos? I mean, do you have chili in them and things like that?

Waitress: We have cheese and lettuce, and we have sauce, you know, put on them.

Att'y: I mean do you guarantee that they are authentic Mexican tacos?

Waitress:...I don't know. Hey Lou, do we have authentic Mexican tacos?

Woman's voice from kitchen: What?

Waitress: Authentic Mexican tacos.

Lou: We have tacos. I don't know how Mexican they are.

Att'y: Yeah, well, I just want to make sure I get what I'm paying for. 'Cause they're five for a dollar? I'll take five of them.

Duke: Taco burger, what's that?

(Sound. of diesel engine truck. -Ed.] Att'y: That's a hamburger. with a taco in the middle.

Duke: A taco on a bun.

Att'y: I betcha your tacos are just hamburgers with a shell sad of a bun.

Waitress: I don't know Att'y: You just started working here?

Waitress: Today.

Att'y: I thought so, I've never saw you here before. You go school around here?

Waitress: No, I don't go to school.

Duke: Oh? Why not? Are you sick?

Att'y: Never mind that. We came here for tacos.

[Pause.] Att'y: As your attorney I advise you to get the chiliburger. a hamburger with chili on it.

Duke: That's too heavy for me.

Att'y: Then I advise you to get a taco burger, try that one. Duke:...the taco has meat in it. I'll try that one. And coffee now. Right now. So I can drink it while I'm waiting.

Waitress: That's all you want, one taco burger? Duke: Well, I'll try it, I might want two. Att'y: Are your eyes blue or green?

Waitress: Pardon?
Att'y: Blue or green?
Waitress: They change.
Att'y: Like a lizard?
Waitress: Like a cat.
Att'y: Oh, the lizard changes the color of his skin...
Waitress: Want anything to drink?
Att'y: Beer. And I have beer in the car. Tons of it. The back seat's full of it.
Duke: I don't like mixing coconuts up with beer and ham—let's smash the bastards.. right in the middle of the highway...Is Boulder City somewhere around Waitress: Boulder City? Do you want sugar?
Duke: Yeah.
Att'y: We're in Boulder City, huh? Or very close to it?
Duke: I don't know.
Waitress: There it is. That sign says Boulder City, OK. Aren't you from Nevada?
Att'y: No. We've never been here before. Just traveling through.
Waitress: You just go straight up this road here.
Att'y: Any action up there in Boulder City?
Waitress: Don't ask me. I don't...
Att'y: Any gambling there?
Waitress: I don't know, it's just a little town.
Duke: Where is the casino?
Waitress: I don't know.
Att'y: Wait a minute, where are you from?
Waitress: New York.
Att'y: And you've just been here a day.
Waitress: No, I've been here for a while.
Att'y: Where do you go around here? Say you wanted to go swimming or something like that?
Waitress: In my backyard.
Att'y: What's the address?
Waitress: Um, go to the...ah...the pool's not open yet.
Att'y: Let me explain it to you, let me run it down just briefly if I can. We're looking for the American Dream, and we were told it was somewhere in this area . ... Well, we're here looking for it, 'cause they sent us out here

all the way from San Francisco to look for it. That's why they gave us this white Cadillac, they figure that we could catch up with it in that...

Waitress: Hey Lou, you know where the American Dream is?

Att'y (to Duke): She's asking the cook if he knows where the American Dream is.

Waitress: Five tacos, one taco burger. Do you know where the American Dream is?

Att'y: Well, we don't know, we were sent out here from Francisco to look for the American Dream, by a magazine to cover it.

Lou: Oh, you mean a place.

Att'y: A place called the American Dream.

Lou: Is that the old Psychiatrist's Club?

Waitress: I think so.

Att'y: The old Psychiatrist's Club?

Lou: Old Psychiatrist's Club, it's on Paradise . . Are you serious?

Att'y: Oh, no honest, look at that car, I mean, do I look like own a car like that?

Lou: Could that be the old Psychiatrist's Club? It was a discoteque place...

Att'y: Maybe that's it.

Waitress: It's on Paradise and what?

Lou: Ross Allen had the old Psychiatrist's Club. Is he the owner now?

Duke: I don't know.

Att'y: All we were told was, go till you find the American Dream. Take this white Cadillac and go find the American Dream. It's somewhere in the Las Vegas area. Lou: That has to be the old ...

Att'y:...and it's a silly story to do, but you know, that's we get paid for.

Lou: Are you taking pictures of it, or...

Att'y: No, no--no pictures.

Lou:...or did somebody just send you on a goose chase?

Att'y: It's sort of a wild goose chase, more or less, but personally we're dead serious.

Lou: Thas to be the old Psychiatrist's Club, but the only people who hang out there is a bunch of pushers, peddlers, up wners, and all that stuff.

Att'y: Maybe that's it. Is it a nighttime place or is it an all day...

Lou: Oh, honey, this never stops. But it’s not a casino.

Att'y: What kind of place is it?

Lou: It's on Paradise, uh, the old Psychiatrist's Club's on Paradise.

Att'y: Is that what it's called, the old Psychiatrist's Club?

Lou: No, that is what it used to be, but someone bought it...but I didn't hear about it as the American Dream, it was something like, associated with, uh . .. it's a mental joint, where all the dopers hang out.

Att'y: A mental joint? You mean like a mental hospital? Lou: No, honey, where all the dope peddlers and all the pushers, everybody hangs out. It's a place where all the kids are potted when they go in, and everything ... but it's not called what you said, the American Dream.

Att'y: Do you have any idea what it might be called? Or more or less where it might be located?

Lou: Right off of Paradise and Eastern.

Waitress: But Paradise and Eastern are parallel.

Lou: Yeah, but I know I come off of Eastern, and then I go to Paradise Waitress: Yeah I know it, but then that would make it off Paradise around the Flamingo, straight up here. I think somebody's handed you a Att'y: We're staying at the Flamingo. I think this place you're talking about and the way you're describing it, I think that maybe that's it.

Lou: It's not a tourist joint.

Att'y: Well, that's why they sent me. He's the writer: I'm the bodyguard. 'Cause I figure it will be...

Lou: These guys are nuts...these kids are nuts.

Att'y: That's OK.

Waitress: Yeah, they got new laws.

Duke: Twentyfourhouraday violence? Is that what we're saying?

Lou: Exactly. Now here's the Flamingo...Oh, I can't show you this; I can tell you better my way. Right up here at the first gas station is Tropicana, take a right.

Att'y: Tropicana to the right.

Lou: The first gas station is Tropicana. Take a right on Tropicana and take this way...right on Tropicana, right on Paradice, you'll see a big black building, it's all painted black real weird looking.

Att'y: Right on Tropicana, right on Paradise, black building...

Lou: And there's a sign on the side of the building that says Psychiatrist's Club, but they're completely remodeling it and everything.

Att’y: All right, that's close enough Lou: If there's anything I can do for ya, honey... I don't know if that's even it or not. But it sounds like it is. I

think you boys are on the right track.

Att'y: Right. That's the best lead we've had for two days, we've been asking people all around.

Lou:...I could make a couple calls and sure as hell find out.

Att'y: Could you?

Lou: Sure I'll call Allen and ask him.

Att'y: Gee, I'd appreciate that if you could.

Waitress: When you go down to Tropicana, it's not the first gas station, the second.

Lou: There's a big sign right down the street here, it says Tropicana Avenue. Make a right, and when you get to Paradice make another right.

Att'y: OK. Big black building, right on Paradise: twentyfourhouraday violence, drugs Waitress: See, here's Tropicana, and this is Boulder Highway that goes clear down like that.

Duke: Well, that's pretty far into town then.

Waitress: Well, here's Paradise split up somewhere around there. There’s Paradice. Paradise. Yeah, we're down in here. See, this is Boulder Highway...and Tropicana.

Lou: Well, that's not it, that bartender in there is a pothead too...

Att'y: Yeah, well, it's a lead.

Lou: You gonna be glad you stopped here, boys.

Duke: Only if we find it.

Att'y: Only if we write the article and get it in.

Waitress: Well, why don't you come inside and sit down?

Duke: We're trying to get as much sun as we can.

Att'y: She's going to make a phone call to find out where it Is.

Duke: Oh. OK, well, let's go inside. EDITOR'S NOTE (cont.): Tape cassettes for the next sequence were impossible to transcribe due to some viscous liquid encrusted behind the heads. There is a certain consistency in the garbled sounds however, indicating that almost two hours later Dr.

Duke and his attorney finally located what was left of the “Old Psychiatrist's Club”-a huge slab of cracked, scorched concrete in a vacant lot full of tall weeds. The owner of a gas station across the road said the place had “burned down about three years ago."

10. Heavy Duty at the Airport...Ugly Peruvian Flashback ...”No! It’s Too Late! Don’t Try It!”

My attorney left at dawn. We almost missed the first flight to LA. because I couldn't find the airport. It was less than thirty minutes from the hotel. I was sure of that. So we left the Flamingo at exactly seventhirty...but for some reason we failed to make the turnoff at the stoplight in front of the Tropicana. We kept going straight ahead on the freeway, that parallels the main airport runway, but on the opposite from the terminal...and there is no way to get across legally.

“Goddamnit! We're lost!” my attorney was shouting. What are we doing out here on this godforsaken road? The airport is right over there!” He pointed hysterically across the tundra.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I've never missed a plane yet.” I smiled as the memory came back. “Except once in Peru,” I added. “I was already checked out of country, through customs, but I went back to the bar to chat with this Bolivian cocaine dealer...and all of a sudden I heard those big 707 engines starting up, so I ran out to the runway and tried to get aboard but the door was right behind the engines and they’d already rolled the ladder away. Shit, those afterburners would have fried me like bacon...but I was completely out of my head: I was desperate to get aboard.

“The airport cops saw me coming, and they gathered into a knot at the gate. I was running like a bastard, straight at them. The guy with me was screaming: 'No! It's too late! Don't try it!'

“I saw the cops waiting for me, so I slowed down like maybe I'd changed my mind ... but when I saw them relax, I did a quick change of pace and tried to run right over the bastards.” I laughed. “Jesus, it was like running full bore into a closet full of gila monsters. The fuckers almost killed me. All I remember is seeing five or six billyclubs coming down on me at the same time, and a lot of voices screaming: 'No! No! It's suicide! Stop the crazy gringo!' “I woke up about two hours later in a bar in downtown Lima. They'd stretched me out in one of those halfmoon leather booths. My luggage was all stacked beside me. No body had opened it...so I went back to sleep and caught the first flight out, the next morning.” My attorney was only half listening. “Look,” he said, “I'd really like to hear more about your adventures in Peru, but not now. Right now all I care about is getting across that god damn runway.” We were flashing along at good speed. I was looking for an opening, some kind of access road, some lane across the run way to the terminal. We were five miles past the last stop light and there wasn't enough time to turn around and go back to it.

There was only one way to make it on time. I hit the brakes and eased the Whale down into the grassy moat between the two freeway lanes. The ditch was too deep for a headon run, so I took it at an angle. The Whale almost rolled, but I kept the wheels churning and we careened up the opposite bank and into the oncoming lane. Fortunately, it was empty. We came out of the moat with the nose of the car up in the air like a hydroplane.. . then bounced on the freeway and kept on going into the cactus field on the other side. I recall running over a fence of some kind said dragging it a few hundred yards, but by the time w e got to the runway way we were under control...screaming along about 60 miles an in low gear, and it looked like a wideopen run all the to the terminal.

My only worry was the chance of getting crushed like a roach by an incoming DC-8, which we probably wouldn't see until it was right on top of us. I wondered if they could see us in the tower. Probably so, but why worry? I kept the thing floored. There was no point in turning back now.

My attorney was hanging onto the dashboard with both nds. I glanced over and saw fear in his eyes. His face appeared to be grey, and I sensed he was not happy with this move, but we were going so fast across the runway —then cactus, then runway again—that I knew he understood our situation: We were past the point of debating the wisdom of is move; it was already done, and our only hope was to get the other side.

I looked at my skeletonface Accutron and saw that we had three minutes and fifteen seconds before takeoff. “Plenty of time,” I said. “Get your stuff together. I'll drop you right next the plane.” I could see the big red and silver Western jetliner about 1000 yards ahead of us...and by this time we were skimming across smooth asphalt, past the incoming runway.

“No!” he shouted. “I can't get out! They'll crucify me. I'll have to take the blame!"

“Rediculous,” I said. “Just say you were hitchhiking to the airport and I picked you up. You never saw me before. Shit, thos town is full of white Cadillac convertibles...and I plan to go through there so fast that nobody will even glimpse the goddamn license plate.” We were approaching the plane. I could see passengers but so far nobody had noticed us...approaching from this unlikely direction. “Are you ready?” I said.

“Why not? But for Christ's sake, let's do it fast! He was scanning the loading area, then he pointed: “Over there!” he said. “Drop me behind that big van. Just pull in behiond it ad I’ll jump out where they can’t see me,

then you can make a run for it.” I nodded. So far, we had all the room we needed. No sign of alarm or pursuit. I wondered if maybe this kind of thing hap pened all the time in Vegascars full of latearriving passengers screeching desperately across the runway, dropping off wildeyed Samoans clutching mysterious canvas bags who would sprint onto planes at the last possible second and then roar off into the sunrise.

Maybe so, I thought. Maybe this kind of thing is standard procedure in this town I swung in behind the van and hit the brakes just long enough for my attorney to jump out. “Don't take any guff from these swine,” I yelled. “Remember, if you have any trouble you can always send a telegram to the Right People.” He grinned. “Yeah...Explaining my Position,” he said. “Some asshole wrote a poem about that once. It's probably good advice, if you have shit for brains.” He waved me off.

“Right,” I said, moving out. I'd already spotted a break in the big hurricane fenceand now, with the Whale in low gear, I went for it. Nobody seemed to be chasing me. I couldn't understand it. I glanced in the mirror and saw my attorney climbing into the plane, no sign of a struggle...and then I was through the gate and out into the early morning traffic on Paradise Road.

I took a fast right on Russell, then a left onto Maryland Parkway...and suddenly I was cruising in warm anonym ity past the campus of the University of Las Vegas...no tension on these faces; I stopped at a red light and got lost, for a moment, in a sunburst of flesh in the crosswalk: fine sinewy thighs, pink miniskirts, ripe young nipples, sleeveless blouses, long sweeps of blonde hair, pink lips and blue eyes- all the hallmarks of a dangerously innocent culture.

I was tempted to pull over and start mumbling obscene en treaties: “Hey, Sweetie, let's you and me get weird. Jump into this hotdog Caddy and we’ll flash over to my suite at the Flamingo, load up on ether and behave like wild animals in my private, kidneyshaped pool ..” Sure we will, I thought. But by this time I was far down the parkway, easing into the turn lane for a left at Flamingo Road. Back to the hotel, to take stock. There was every reason to believe I was heading for trouble, that I'd pushed my luck a bit far. I'd abused every rule Vegas lived byburning locals, abusing the tourists, terrifying the help.

The only hope now, I felt, was the possibility that we'd gone to such excess, with our gig, that nobody in a position to bring the hammer down

on us could possibly believe it. Particularily not since we'd signed in with the Police Conference. When you bring an act into this town, you want to bring it in heavy. Don't waste any time with cheap shucks and misde minors. Go straight for the jugular. Get right into felonies.

The mentality of Las Vegas is so grossly atavistic that a really massive crime often slips by unrecognized. One of my neighbors recently spent a week in the Vegas jail for “vagrancy.” He's about twenty years old: Long hair, Levi jacket, napsack—an outfront drifter, a straight Road Person. Totally harmless; he just wanders around the country looking whatever it was that we all thought we'd nailed down in in the Sixtiessort of an early Bob Zimmerman trip.

On a trip from Chicago to L.A., he got curious about Vegas and decided to have a look at it. Just passing through, strolling and digging the sights on the Strip ... no hurry, why rush? He was standing on a streetcorner near the Circus Circus, watching the multicolored fountain, when the copcruiser pulled up.

Wham. Straight to jail. No phone call, no lawyer, no charge. “They put me in the car and took me down to the station.” he said. “They took me into a big room full of people to take off all my clothes before they booked me. I was standing in front of a big desk, about six feet tall, with a cop sitting behind it and looking down at me like some kind of medieval judge.

“The room was full of people. Maybe a dozen prisoners; twice that many cops, and about ten policewomen. You had to walk out in the middle of the room, then take everything out of your pockets and put it up on the desk and then strip nakedwith everybody watching you.

“I only had about twenty bucks, and the fine for vagrancy was twentyfive, so they put me over on a bench with the peo ple who were going to jail. Nobody hassled me. It was like an assembly line.

“The two guys right behind me were longhairs. Acid people. They'd been picked up for vagrancy, too. But when they started emptying their pockets, the whole room freaked. Between them, they had $130,000, mostly in big bills. The cops couldn't believe it. These guys just kept pulling out wads of money and dumping it up there on the deskboth of them naked and kind of hunched over, not saying anything.

“The cops went crazy when they saw all that money. They started whispering to each other; shit, there was no way they could hold these guys for 'vagrancy.“' He laughed. “So they charged them with 'suspicion of

evasion of income taxes.' “They took us all to jail, and these two guys were just about nuts. They were dealers, of course, and they had their stash back in their hotel roomso they had to get out before the cops found out where they were staying.

“They offered one of the guards a hundred bucks to go out and get the best lawyer in town...and about twenty minutes later there he was, yelling about habeas corpus and that kind of shit...hell, I tried to talk to him myself, but this guy had a onetrack mind. I told him I could make bail and even pay him something if they'd let me call my father in Chicago, but he was too busy hustling for these other guys.

“About two hours later he came back with a guard and said 'Let's go.' They were out. One of the guys had told me, while they were waiting, that it was going to cost them $30,000...and I guess it did, but what the hell? That's cheap, compared to what would have happened If they hadn't got themselves sprung.

“They finally let me send a telegram to my old man and he wired me 125 bucks . . .but it took seven or eight days. I’m not sure how long I was in there, because the place didn't have any windows and they fed us every twelve hours...You lose track of time when you can't see the sun. “They had seventyfive guys in each cellbig rooms with a bowl out in the middle. They gave you a pallet when came in, and you slept wherever you wanted. The guy next to me had been in there for thirty years, for robbing a gas station.

“When I finally got out, the cop on the desk took another twentyfive bucks out of what my father sent me, on top of what I owed for the vagrancy fine. What could I say? He just took it. Then he gave me the other $75 and said they had a cab waiting for me outside, for the ride to the airport...and when I got in the cab the driver said, 'We're not making any stops, fella, and you'd better not move until we get to the terminal.' “I didn't move a goddamn muscle. He'd have shot me. I'm sure of that. I went straight to the plane and I didn't say a word to anybody until I knew we were out of Nevada. Man, it's one place I'll never go back to."

11. Fraud? Larcent? Rape?...A Brutal Connection with the Alice from Room Service

I was brooding on this tale as I eased the White Whale into Flamingo parking lot. Fifty bucks and a week in jail for standing on a corner and acting curious...

Jesus, what kind of incredible penalties would they spew out on me? I eked off the various chargesbut in skeleton, legallan re form they didn't seem so bad: Rape? We could surely beat that one. I'd never even coveted the goddamn girl, much less put my hands on her flesh. Fraud? Larceny? I could always offer to “settle.” Pay it off. Say I was sent out here by Sports Illustrated and then drag the Time. Inc. lawyers into a nightmare lawsuit. Tie them up for years with a blizzard of writs and appeals.

Attach all their assets in places like Juneau and Houston, then constantly file for change of venue to Quito, Nome and Aruba...keep the thing moving, run them in circles, force them into conflict with the accounting department:

TIME SHEET FOR ABNER H. DODGE,

CHIEF COUNSEL Item $44,066.12... Special outlay, to wit: We pursued the defendant, R. Duke, throughtout the Western Hemosphere and finally brought him to bay in a village on the north shore of an island known as Culebra in the Caribbean, where his attorney obtained a ruliong that all further proceedings should be conducted in the language of the Carib tribe. We sent three men to Berlitz for this purpose, but nineteen hours before the date scheduled for opening arguments, the defendant fled to Colombia, where he established residence in a fishing village called Guajira near the Venezuelan border, where the official language of jurisprudence is an obscure dialect known as “Guajiro.” After many monthe we were able to establish 3urls- diction in this place, but by that time the defendant had moved his residence to a virtually inaccessible port at the headwaters of the Amazon River, where he cultivated powerful connec tions with a tribe of headhunters called '”Jibaros.” Our stringer in Manaus was dispatched upriver, to locate and hire a native attorney conversant in Jibaro, but the search has been hampered by serious communications problems. There is in fact grave concern, in our Rio office, that the widow of the aforementioned Manaus stringer might obtain a ruinous judgmentdue to bias in local courtsfar larger than any thing a jury in our own country would consider reasonable or even sane.

Indeed. But what is sane? Especially here in “our own country”-in this doomstruck era of Nixon. We are all wired into a survival trip now. No more of the speed that fueled the Sixties. Uppers are going out of style. This was the fatal flaw in Tim Leary's trip. He crashed around America selling “con sciousness expansion” without ever giving a thought to the grim

meathook realities that were lying in wait for all the people who took him too seriously. After West Point and the Priesthood, LSD must have seemed entirely logical to him...but there is not much satisfaction in knowing that he blew it very badiy for himself, because he took too many oth ers down with him.

Not that they didn't deserve it: No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them. All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding fot three bucks a hit. But their failure is ours, too.

What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole lifestyle that he helped to create...a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential oldmystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebodyor at least some forceis tending that Light at the end of the tunnel.

This is the same cruel and paradoxically benevolent bullshit has kept the Catholic Church going for so many centuries. It is also the military ethic...a blind faith in some higher and wiser "authority." The Pope, The General, The Prime Minister . . . all the way up to "God." One of the crucial moments of the Sixties came on that day when the Beatles cast their lot with the Maharishi. It was like Dylan going to the Vatican to kiss the Pope's ring.

First "gurus." Then, when that didn't work, back to Jesus. And now, following Manson's primitive/instinct lead, a whole new wave of clantype commune Gods like Mel Lyman, ruler Avatar, and What's His Name who runs "Spirit and Flesh." Barger never quite got the hang of it, but he'll never iw how close he was to a kinghell breakthrough. The An- blew it in 1965, at the OaklandBerkeley line, when they acted on Barger's hardhat, conboss instincts and attacked the front ranks of an antiwar march. This proved to be an historic schism in the then Rising Tide of the Youth Movement of the Sixties. It was the first open break between the Greasers and the Longhairs, and the importance of that break can be read in the history of SDS, which eventually destroyed in the doomed effort to reconcile the interests of the 'working class biker/dropout types and the upper/mid Berkeley/student activists.

Nobody involved in that scene, at the time, could possibly have foreseen the Implications of the Ginsberg/Kesey failure to pursuade the Hell's Angels to join forces with the radical Left from Berkeley. The final split

came at Altamont, four years later, but by that time it had long been clear to everybody except a handful of rock industry dopers and the national press. The orgy of violence at Altamont merey dramatized the problem. The realities were already fixed; the illness was understood to be terminal, and the energies of The Movement were long since aggressively dissipated by the rush to selfpreservation.

Ah; this terrible gibberish. Grim memories and bad flash backs, looming up through the time/fog of Stanyan Street...no solace for refugees, no point in looking back. The question, as always, is now ...?

I was slumped on my bed in the Flamingo, feeling dangerously out of phase with my surroundings. Something ugly was about to happen. I was sure of it. The room looked like the site of some disastrous zoological experiment involving whiskey and gorillas. The tenfoot mirror was shattered, but still hanging together—bad evidence of that afternoon when my attorney ran amok with the coconut hammer, smashing mirror and all the lightbulbs.

We'd replaced the lights with a package of red and blue Christmas tree lights from Safeway, but there was no hope of saving the mirror. My attorney's bed looked like a burned- rat's nest. Fire had consumed the top half, and the rest a mass of wire and charred stuffing. Luckily, the maids had'nt come near the room since that awful confrontation on Tuesday.

I been asleep when the maid came in that morning. We'd forgotten to hang out the "Do Not Disturb" sign...so she wandered into the room and startled my attorney, who kneeling, stark naked, in the closet, vomiting into his shoes . . . thinking he was actually in the bathroom, and then suddenly looking up to see a woman with a face like Mickey Rooney staring down at him, unable to speak, trembling with fear and confusion.

She was holding that mop like an axehandle," he said "So I came out of the closet in a kind of running crouch, vomiting, and hit her right at the knees . . . it was pure instinct; I thought she was ready to kill me...and then, she screamed, that's when I put the icebag on her mouth." I remembered that scream...one of the most terrifiying sounds I'd ever heard. I woke up and saw my attorney grappling desperately on the floor right next to my bed with what appeared to be an old woman. The room was full of electric noise. The TV set, hissing at top volume on a nonexistent channel. I could barely hear the woman's cries as she struggled to get the icebag away from her face...but she was no match for my attorney's naked bulk, and he finally

managed to pin her in a corner behind the TV set, clamping his hands on her throat while she babbled I...“Please...please...I’m only the maid, I did’nt mean anything...” I was out of bed in a flash, grabbing my wallet and waving the gold Policemen's Benevolent Assn. press badge in front of her face.“You're under arrest!” I shouted.

“No!” she groaned. “I just wanted to clean up!” My attorney got to his feet, breathing heavily. “She must have used a pass key,” he said. “I was polishing my shoes in the closet when I noticed her sneaking inso I took her.” He was trembling, drooling vomit off his chin, and I could see at a glance that he understood the gravity of this situation. Our behavior, this time, had gone far past the boundaries of private kinkiness. Here we were, both naked, staring down at a terrified old woman—a hotel employee—stretched out on the floor of our suite in a paroxysm of fear and hysteria. She would have to be dealt with.

“What made you do it?” I asked her. “Who paid you off?"

“Nobody!” she wailed. “I'm the maid!"

“You're lying!” shouted my attorney. “You were after the evidence! Who put youup to this—the manager?"

“I work for the hotel,” she said. “All I do is clean up the rooms.” I turned to my attorney. “This means they know what we have,” I said. “So they sent this poor old woman up here to steal it."

“No!” she yelled. “I don't know what you're talking about!"

“Bullshit!” said my attorney. “You're just as much a part of it as they are."

Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas

“Part of what?"

“The dope ring,” I said. “You must know what's going on in this hotel. Why do you think we're here?” She stared at us, trying to speak but only blubbering. “I know you're cops,” she said finally. “But I thought you were just here for that convention. I swear! All I wanted to do was clean up your room. I don't know anything about dope!” My attorsey laughed. “Come on, baby. Don't try to tell us you never heard of the Grange Gorman."

“No!” she yelled. “No! I swear to Jesus I never heard of that stuff!” My attorney seemed to think for a moment, then he leaned to help the old lady to her feet. “Maybe she's telling the he said to me. “Maybe she's not part of it."

“No! I swear I'm not!” she howled.

“Well .. .” I said. “In that case, maybe we won't have to put her away...maybe she can help."

“Yes!” she said eagerly. “I'll help you all you need! I hate dope!"

“So do we, lady,” I said.

“I think we should put her on the payroll,” said my attorney. “Have her checked out, then line her up for a Big One each month, depending on what she comes up with."

The old woman's face had changed markedly. She no longer seemed disturbed to find herself chatting with two naked men, one of whom had tried to strangle her just a few moments earlier.

“Do you think you could handle it?” I asked her.

“What?"

“One phone call every day,” said my attorney. “Just tell us what you've seen.” He patted her on the shoulder. “Don't worry if it doesn't add up. That's our problem.” She grinned. “You'd pay me for that?"

“You’re damn right,” I said. “But the first time you say anything about this, to anybody—you'll go straight to prison for the rest of your life.” She nodded. “I'll help any way that I can,” she said. “But who should I call?"

“Don’t worry,” said my attorney. “What's your name?"

“Alice.” she said. “Just ring Linen Service and ask for Alice."

“You’ll be contacted,” I said. “It'll take about a week. But keep your eyes open and try to act normal. Can you do that?"

“Oh, yes sir!” she said. “Will I see you gentlemen again?” She grinned sheepishly. “After this, I mean..

“No,” said my attorney. “They sent us down from Carson City. You'll be contacted by Inspector Rock. Arthur Rock. He'll be posing as a politician, but you won't have any trouble recognizing him.” She seemed to be shuffling nervously.

“What's wrong?” I said. “Is there something you haven't told us?"

“Oh no!” she said quickly. “I was just wondering—who's going to pay me?"

“Inspector Rock will take care of that,” I said. “It'll all be in cash: a thousand dollars on the ninth of every month."

“Oh Lord!” she exclaimed. “I'd do just about anything for that!"

“You and a lot of other people,” said my attorney. “You'd be surprised who we have on the payroll—right here in this same hotel.” She looked stricken. “Would I know them?"

“Probably,” I said. “But they're all undercover. The only way you'll ever know is if something really serious happens and one of them has to contact you in public, with the pass word."

“What is it?” she asked.

“'One Hand Washes the Other,“' I said. “The minute you hear that, you say: 'I fear nothing.' That way, they'll know you.” She nodded. repeating the code several times, while we listened tomake sure she had it right. “OK,” said my attorney. “That’s it for now. We probably won;t be seeing you again until the hammer comes down. You’ll be better off ignoring us until we leave. Don’t bother to make up the room. Just elave a pile of towels and soap outside the door, exactly at modnight.” He smiled. “That way, we won;t have to risk another one of these little incidents, will we?” She moved towards the door. “Whatever you say gentlemen. I can;t tell you how sorry I am about what happened...but it was only because I didn't realize.” My attorney ushered her out. “We understand,” he said “But it's all over now. Thank God for the decent people.” She smiled as she closed the door behind her.

She nodded, repeating the code several times, while we lis tened to make sure she had it right.

“OK,” said my attorney. “That's it for Dow. We probably won't be seeing you again until the hammer comes down. You'll be better off ignoring us until we leave. Don't bother to make up the room. Just leave a pile of towels and soap outside the door, exactly at midnight.” lie smiled.

“That way, we won't have to risk another one of theep little incidents, will we?"

12. Return to the Circus—Circus...Looking for the Ape...to Hell with the American Dream

Almost seventytwo hours had passed since that strange encounter, and no maid had set foot in the room. I wondered what Alice had told them. We had seen her once, trundling a laundry cart across the parking area as we rolled up in the Whale but we offered no sign of recognition and she seemed understand.

But it couldn't last much longer. The room was full of used towels; they were hanging everywhere. The bathroom floor was about six inches deep with soap bars, vomit, and grape fruit rinds, mixed with broken glass. I had to put my boots on every I went in there to piss. The nap of the mottled grey rug was so thick with marijuana seeds that it appeared to be turning green.

The general backalley ambience of the suite was so rotten, so incredibly foul, that I figured I could probably get away with claiming it was some kind of “Lifeslice exhibit” that we’d brought down from Haight Street, to show cops from other parts of the country how deep into filth and degeneracy the drug people will sink, if left to their own devices.

But what kind of addict would need all these coconut husks and crushed honeydew rinds? Would the presence of junkies account for all these uneaten french fries? These puddles of glazed catsup on the bureau?

Maybe so. But then why all this booze? and these crude pornographic photos, ripped out of pulp magazines like Whores of Sweden and Orgies in the Casbah, that were plastered on the broken mirror with smears of mustard that had dried to a hard yellow crust...and all these signs of violence, these strange red and blue bulbs and shards of broken glass embedded in the wall plaster ...

No, these were not the hoofprints of your normal, godfearing junkie. It was far too aggressive. There was evidence, in this room, of excessive consumption of almost every type of drug known to civilized man since 1544 A.D. It could only be explained as a montage, a sort of exaggerated medical exhibit, put together very carefully to show what might happen if twentytwo serious drug felons—each with a different addiction—were penned up together in the same room for five days and nights, without relief.

Indeed. But of course that would never happen in Real Life, gentlemen. We just put this thing together for demonstration purposes...

Suddenly the phone was ringing, jerking me out of my fantasy stupor. I looked at it. Riiiinnnnngggggg...Jesus, what now? Is this it? I could almost hear the shrill voice of the Manager, Mr. Heem, saying the police were on their way up to my room and would I please not shoot through the door when they began kicking it down.

Riinnnngggg...No, they wouldn't call first. Once they decided to take me, they would probably set an ambush in the elevator: first Mace, then a gangswarm. It would come with no warning.

So I picked up the phone. It was my friend Bruce Innes, calling from the CircusCircus. He had located the man who wanted to sell the ape I'd been inquiring about. The price was $750.

“What kind of a greedhead are we dealing with here?” I said. “Last night it was four hundred."

“He claims he just found out it was housebroken,” said Bruce. “He let it sleep in the trailer last noght, and the thing actually shiot in the shower stall."

“That doesn't mean anything,” I said. “Apes are attracted to water. Next time it'll shit in the sink."

“Maybe you should come down and argue with the guy,” said Bruce. “He's here in the bar with me. I told him you really wanted the ape and that you could give it a fine home. I think he'll negotiate. He's really attached to the stinking thing. It's here in the bar with us, sitting up on a goddamn stool, slobbering into a beer schooner."

“Okay,” I said. “I'll be there in ten minutes. Don't let the bastard get drunk. I want to meet him under natural conditions.”

When I got to the CircusCircus they were loading an old man into an ambulance outside the main door. “What happened?” I asked the carkeeper.

“I’m not sure,” he said. “Somebody said he had a stroke. But I noticed the back of his head was all cut up.” He slid into the Whale and handed me a stub. “You want me to save your drink for you?” he asked, holding up a big glass of tequila that was on the seat of the car. “I can put it in the cooler if want.” I nodded. These people were familiar with my habits. I had been in and out of the place so often, with Bruce and the and members, that the carkeepers knew me by name—although I'd never introduced myself, and nobody had ever asked me. I just assumed it was all part of the gig here;

that that they'd probably rifled the glove compartment and found a notebook with my name on it.

The real reason, which didn't occur to me at the time, was that I was still wearing my ID/badge from the District Attorney's Conference. It was dangling from the pocketflap of my multicolored birdshooting jacket, but I'd long since forgotten about it. No doubt they all assumed I was some kind of super wierd undercover agent...or maybe not; maybe they were just humoring me because they figured anybody crazy enough to pose as a cop while driving around Vegas in a white Cadillac convertible with a drink in his hand almost had to be Heavy, and perhaps even dangerous. In a scene where, nobody with any ambition is really what he appears to be,' there's not much risk in acting like a kinghell freak. The, overseers will nod wisely at each other and mutter about "these goddamn noclass putons." The other side of that coin is the "Goddamn! Who's that?" syndrome. This comes from people like doormen and floor- walkers who assume that anybody who acts crazy, but still tips big, must be importantwhich means he should be hu mored, or at least treated gently.

But none of this makes any difference with a head full of mescaline. You justblunder around, doing anything that seems to be right, and it usually is. Vegas is so full of natural freakspeople who are genuinely twistedthat drugs aren't really a problem, except for cops and the scag syndicate. Psychedelics are almost irrelevant in a town where you can wan der into a casino any time of the day or night and witness the crucifixion of a gorillaon a flaming neon cross that suddenly turns into a pinwheel, spinning the beast around in wild cir cles above the crowded gambling action.

I found Bruce at the bar, but there was no sign of the ape. "Where is it?" I demanded. "I'm ready to write a check. I want to take the bastard back home on the plane with me. I've already reserved two firstclass seats—R. Duke and Son."

"Take him on the plane?"

"Hell yes," I said. "You think they'd say anything? Call at tention to my son's infirmities?" He shrugged. "Forget it," he said. "They just took him away. He attacked an old man right here at the bar. The creep started hassling the bartender about 'allowing barefoot rabble in the place' and just about then the ape let out a shriekso the loud the guy threw a beer at him, and the ape went crazy, came out of his seat like a jackinthe box and took a

big bite out of the old man’s head ... the bartender had to call an ambulance, then the cops came and took the ape away."

“Goddamnit,” I said. “What’s the bail? I want that ape."

“Get a grip on yourself,” he said. “You better stay clear of that jail. That’s all they need to put the cuffs on you. Forget that ape. You don’t need him.” I gave it some thought, then decided he was probably right. There was no sense blowing everything just for the sake of some violent ape I’d never met. For all I knew, hed take a bite out of my head if I tried to bail him out. It would take him a while to calm down, after the shock of being put behind bars, and I couldnt afford to wait around. “When are you taking off?” Bruce asked.

“As soon as possible,” I said. No point hanging around this town any lobger. IU have all I need. Anything else would only confuse me.” He seemed suprised. “You found the American Dream?” he said. “In this town?” I nodded. “We’re sitting on the main nerve rightnow,” I said. “You remember that story the manager told us about the owner of this place? How he always wanted to run away and join the circus when he was a kid?” Bruce ordered two more beers. He looked over the casino for a moment, then shrugged. “Yeah, I see what you mean,” he said. “Now the bastard has his own circus, and a license to steal, too.” He nodded. “You’re right—he’s the model."

“Absolutely,” I said. “It’s pure Horatio Alger, all the way down to his attitude. I tried to tell the woman that I agreed with everything he stood for, but she said if I knew what was good for me I’d get the hell out of town and not even think about bothering the Boss. “He really hates reporters” she said. “I don’t mean this to sound like a warning, bit if I were you I’d take it that way ... “” Bruce nodded. The Boss was paying him a thousand bucks a week to work two sets a night in the Leopard Lounge, andanother two grand for the group. All they had to do was make a hell of a lot of noise for two hours every night. The Boss didn't give a flying fuck what kind of songs they sang, just as long as the beat was heavy and the amps were turned up loud enough to lure people into the bar.

It was strange to sit there in Vegas and hear Bruce singing powerful stuff like “Chicago” and “Country Song.” If the management had bothered to hear the lyrics, the whole band would have been tarred and feathered.

Several months later, in Aspen, Bruce sang the same songs in a club jammed with tourists and a former Astronaut* and when the last set was

over, ___ came over to our table and began yelling all kinds of drunken, superpatriot gibber ish, hitting on Bruce about “What kind of nerve does a god damn Canadian have to come down here and insult this country?"

“Say man,” I said. “I'm an Ameiican. I live here, and I agree with every fucking word he says.” At this point the hashbouncers appeared, grinning inscrutably and saying: “Good evening to you gentlemen. The I Ching says it's time to be quiet, right? And nobody hassles the musicians in this place, is that clear?” The Astronaut left, muttering darkly about using his in fluence to “get something done, damn quick,” about the Immigration Statutes. “What's your name?” he asked me, as the hashbouncers eased him away.

“Bob Zimmerman,” I said. “And if there's one thing I hate in this world, it's a goddamn bonehead Polack."

“You think I'm a Polack?” he screamed. “You dirty gold bricker! You're all shit! You don't represent this country."

“Christ, let’s hope to hell you don’t.” Bruce Mmuttered. ____ was still raving as they muscled him out to the street.

T^he nest noght, in another restaurant, the Astronaut was scarfing his chow—stone soer—when a fourteen year old boy approached the table to ask for an autograph. ____ acted coy moment, feigning embarrassment, then he scrawled his signature on the small piece of paper the boy handed him. The boy looked at it for a moment, then tore it into small pieces and dropped it in -____'s lap. “Not everybody loves you, man.” he said. Then he went back and sat down at his own table about six feet away.

The Astronaut's party was speechiess. Eight or ten people—wives, managers and favored senior engineers, showing a good time in fabulous Aspen. Now they looked like somebody had just sprayed their table with shitmist. Nobody a word. They ate quickly, and left without tipping.

So much for Aspen and astronauts. _____ would never have kind of trouble in LasVegas.

A little bit of this town goes a very long way. After five in Vegas you feel like you've been here for five years. Some people say they like it—but then some people like Nixon, too. He would have made a perfect Mayor for this town; with John Mitchell as Sheriff and Agnew as Master of Sewers.

13. End of the Road ...Death of the Whale...Soaking Sweats in the Airport.

When I tried to sit down at the baccarat table the bouncers the arm on me. “You don't belong here,” one of them said quietly. “Let's go outside."

“Why not?” I said.

They took me out to the front entrance and signaled for the Whale to be brought up.

“Where's your friend?” they asked, while we waited.

'What friend?” 'The big spic."

“Look,” I said. “I'm a Doctor of Journalism. You'd never me hanging around this place with a goddamn spic.” They. laughed. “Then what about this?” they said. And they confronted me with a big photograph of me and my attorney at a table in the floating bar.

I srugged. “That's not me,” I said. “That's a guy named Thompson. He works for Rolling Stone...a really vicious, crazy kind of person. And that guy sitting next to him is a hit man for the Mafia in Hollywood. Shit, have you studied this photograph? What kind of a maniac would roam around wearing one black glove."

“We noticed that.” They said. “Where is he now?” I shrugged. “He moves around pretty fast. “ I said. His oerders come out of St. Loius.” They stared at me. “How do you know all this stuff?” I showed them my gold PBA badge, flashing it quickly with my back to the crowd. “Act natural,” I whispered. “Don’t put me on the spot.” They were still standing there when I drove off in the Whale. The geek had brought it up at exactly the right moment. I gave him a fivedollar bill and hit the street with a stylish screech of rubber.

It was all ovet now. I drove across to the Flamingo and loaded all my luggage into the car. I tried to put the top up, for privacy, but something was wrong with the motor. The generator light had been on, fiery red, ever since I'd driven the thing into Lake Mead on a water test. A quick run along the dashboard disclosed that every circuit in the car was to tally fucked. Nothing worked. Not even the headlightsand when I hit the air conditioner button I heard a nasty explosion under the hood.

The top was jammed about halfway up, but I decided to try for the airport. If this goddamn junker wouldn't run right, I could always abandon it and call a cab. To hell with this gar bage from Detroit. They shouldn't be allowed to get away with it.

The sun was coming up when I got to the airport. I left the Whale in the VIP parking lot. A kid about fifteen years old checked it in, but I refused to

answer his questions. He was very excited about the overall condition of the vehicle. “Holy God!” he kept shouting. “How did this happen?” He kept moving around the car, pointing at various dents, rips and crushed places.

“I know,” I said. “They beat the shit out of it. This is a ter rible goddamn town for driving around in convertibles. The worst time was right out on the Boulevard in front of the Sahara. You know that corner where all the junkies hang out? Jesus, I couldn't believe it when they all went crazy at once.” The kid was none too bright. His face had gone blank early on, and now heseemed in a state of mute fear.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I’m insured.” I showed him the contract, pointin to the smallprint clause where it said I was insured against ALL damages, for only two dollars a day.

The kid was still nodding when I fled. I felt a bit guilty about leaving him to deal with the car. There was no way explain the massive damage. It was finished, a wreck, totaled out. Under normal circumstances I would have been seized and arrested when l tried to turn it in...but not at this of the morning, with only this kid to deal with. I was, all, a “VIP.” Otherwise, they would never have chartered the car to me in the first place.....

Let the chickens come home to roost, I thought as I hurried into the airport. It was still too early to act normal, so I hunkered down in the coffee shop behind the LA. Times. Some where down the corridor a jukebox was playing “One Toke Over the Line.” I listened for a moment, but my nerve ends no longer receptive. The only song I might have been to relate to, at that point, was “Mister Tambourine .” Or maybe “Memphis Blues Again...“Aww, mama.. . can this really... be the end...?” My plane left at eight, which meant I had two hours to kill. Feeling desperately visible. There was no doubt in my mind they were looking for me; the net was closing down...only a matter of time before they ran me down like some kind of rabid animal.

I checked all my luggage through the chute. All but the satchel, which was full of drugs. And the .357. Did they have the goddamn metal detector system in this airport? I strolled around to the boarding gate and tried to look casual while I cased the area for black boxes. None were visible. I to take the chancejust zip through the gate with a big smile on my face, mumbling distractedly about “a bad slump in the hardware market. ..

Just another failed salesman checking out. Blame it all on that bastard Nixon. Indeed. I decided it might look more natural if I found somebody to

chat witha routine line of small talk, between passengers: “Hy’re yew, fella! I huess you’re probably wonderin’ what make sme sweat like this? Yeah! Well, god damn, man! Have you read the newspapers today?...You’d never believe what those dirty bastards have doen this time!” I figured that would cover it...But I could’nt find anybody who looked safe enough to talk to. The whole airport was full of people who looked like they might go for my float ing rib if I made a false move. I felt very paranoid...like some kind of criminal skullsucker on the lam from Scotland Yard.

Everywhere I looked I saw Pigs...because on that morn ing the Las Vegas airport was full of cops: the mass exodus after the climax of the District Attorneys' Conference. When I finally put this together I felt much better about the health of my own brain

EVERYTHING seems to be ready.

Are you Ready?

Ready?

Well, why not? This is a heavy day in Vegas. A thousand cops are checking out of town, scurrying through the airport in groups of three and six. They are heading back home. The drug conference is finished. The Airport Lounge is humming with mean talk and bodies. Short beers and Bloody Marys, here and there a victim of chest rash rubbing Mexsana under the armpit straps of a thick shoulder holster. No point hiding this business any longer. Let it all hang out...or at least get some air to it.

Yes, thank you kindly. . I think I busted a button on my trousers. I hope they don't fall down. You don't want my trousers to fall down now, do you?

Fuck no. Not today. N ot right here in the middle of the Las Vegas airport, on this sweaty -hard morning at the tail end of this mass meeting on the Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

“When the train...come in the station...I looked her in the eye... “ Grim music in the airport. “Yes, it’s hard to tell it’’s hard to tell, when all your love’s in Vain...”

Every now and then you run up on one of those days when everythings in vain . . . a stone bummer from start to finish; if you know what's good for you, on days like these you sortof hunker down in a safe corner and watch. Maybe think a bit. Lay back on a cheap wooden chair, screened off from traffic, and shrewdly rip the poptops out of five or eight Budweisers...smoke off a pack of King Marlboros, eat a nutbutter sandwich, and finally toward evening gobble a wad of good mescaline . .. then drive

out, later on, to the beach. Get out in the surf, in the fog, and slosh along on numbfrozen feet about ten yards out from the tideline... stomping through tribes of wild sandpeckers...riderunners, whorehoppers, stupid little birds and crabs and saltsuckershere and there a big pervert or woolly reject gimp off in the distance, wandering alone by themselves behind dunes and driftwood....

These are the ones you will never be properly introduced to—at least not if your luck holds. But the beach is less complicated than a boiling fast morning in the Las Vegas airport.

I felt very obvious. Amphetamine psychosis? Paranoid dementia?—What is it? My Argentine luggage? This crippled, walk that once made me a reject from the Naval ROTC?" Indeed. This man will never be able to walk straight, Captain! Because one leg is longer than the other....Not much. Three eighths of an inch or so, which counted out to about two eights more than the Captain could tolerate.

So we parted company. He accepted a command in the South China Sea, and I became a Doctor of Gonzo Journalism...andmany years later, killing time in the Las Vegas airport this terrible morning, I picked up a newspaper and saw where teh Captain had fucked up very badly: Ship Commander Butchered by Natives After "Accidental" Assault on Guam.

(AOP)-Aboard the USS. Crazy Horse: Somewhere in the Pactfic (Sept. 25)-The entire 3485-man crew of this newest American aircraft carrier is in violent mourning today, after five crewmen including the Captain were diced uplike pineapple meat in a brawl with the Heroin Police at the neutral port of Hong See. Dr. Bboor, the ship's chaplain, presided over tense funeral services at dawn on the flight deck. The 4th Fleet Service Choir sang "Tom Thumb's Blues" . . . and then, while the ship's bells tolled frantically, the remains of the five were set afire in a gourd and hurled into the Pacific by a hooded officer known only as "The Commander." Shortly after the services ended, the crewmen fell to fighting among themselves and all communications with the ship were severed for an indefinite period. Official spokesmen at 4th Fleet Headquarters on Guam said the Navy had "no comment" on the situation, pending the re sults of a toplevel investigation by a team of civilian specialists headed by former New Orleans district attor ney James Garrison.

... Why bother with newspapers, if this is all they offer? Agnew was right. The press is a gang of cruel faggots. Journalism is not a profession or

a trade. It is a cheap catchall for fuckoffs and misfits- a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy pissridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector, but just deep enough for a wine to curl up from the sidewalk and masturbate like a chimp in a zoocage.

14. Farewell to Vegas...“God’s Mercy on You Swine!”

I skulked around the airport, I realized that I was still wearing my police ,identification badge. It was a flat orange rectangle, sealed in clear plastic, that said: “Raoul Duke, Spe cial Investigator, Los Angeles.” I saw it in the mirror above urinal.

Get rid of this thing, I thought. Tear it off. The gig is finished.. . and it proved nothing. At least not to me. And certainly not to my attorneywho also had a badgebut he was back in Malibu, nursing his paranoid sores.

It been a waste of time, a lame fuckaround that was only—in clear retrospect—a cheap excuse for a thousand cops to spend a few days in Las Vegas and lay the bill on the taxpayers. Nobody had learned anything- or at least nothing except new. Except maybe me .. . and all I learned was that the District Attorneys' Association is about ten years behind the grim truth and harsh kinetic realities of what they just recently learned to call “the Drug Culture” in tyhe Year of Our lord, 1971.

They are still burning the taxpayers for thousands of dollars to make films about “the dangers of LSD,” at a time when acid is widely known—to everybody but copsto be the Studenbaker of the drug market, the popularity of psychedelics has fallen off so drastically drastically that most voluime dealers no longer even handle qualioty acid or mescaline except as a favor to special customers: Mainly jaded, over thirty drug dilettantes—likeme, and my attorney.

The big market, these days, is in Downers. Reds and smack -Seconal and heroinand a hellbroth of bad domestic grass sprayed with everything from arsenic to horse tranquillizers. What sells, today, is whateverFucks You Upwhatever shortcircuits your brain and grounds it out for the longest possible time. The ghetto market has mushroomed into subur bia. The Miltown man has turned, with a vengeance, to skin- popping and even mainlining... and for every exspeed freak who drifted, for relief, into smack, there are 200 kids who went straight to the needle off Seconal. They never even bothered to try speed.

Uppers are no longer stylish. Methedrine is almost as rare, on the 1971 market, as pure acid or DMT. “Consciousness Ex pansion” went out with

LBJ . . and it is worth noting, historically, that downers came in with Nixon.

I limped onto the plane with no problem except a wave of ugly vibrations from the other passengers...but my head was so burned out, by then, that I wouldn't have cared if I'd had to climb aboard stark naked and covered with oozing chancres. It would have taken extreme physical force to keep me off that plane. I was so far beyond simple fatigue that I was beginning to feel nicely adjusted to the idea of perma nent hysteria. I felt like the slightest misunderstanding with the stewardess would cause me to either cry or go mad . . . and the woman seemed to sense this, because she treated me very gently.

When I wanted more Ice Cubes for my Bloody Mary, she brought them quickly . . and when I ran out of cigarettes, she gave me a pack from her own purse. The only time she seemed nervous was when I pulled a grapefruita grapefruit out of my satchel and began slicing it up with a hunting knife. I noticed her watching me closely, so I tried to smile. “I never go anywhere without grapefruit,’ “It’s hard to get a really good one—unless you’re rich.” She nodded.

I flashed her the grimace/smile again, but it was hard to know what she was thinking. It was entirely possible, I knew, that sge’d already decided to have me taken off the plane iin a cage when we got to Denver. I stared fixedly into her eyes for a time, but she kept herself under control.

I was asleep when our plane hit the runway, but the jolt brought me instantly awake. I looked out the window and saw the Rocky Mountains. What the fuck was I doing here?I wondered. I t made so sense at all. I decided to call my attorney as soon as possible. Have him iwre me some money to buy a huge albino Doberman. Denver is a national clearinghouse for stolen Dobermans; they come from all parts of the country.

Since i was already here, I though I might as well pick up a vicious do. But first, something for my nerves. Immediately after the plane landed I rushed up the corridor to the airport drugstore adn asked the clerk for a box of amyls.

She began to fidget and shake her head. “Oh, no,” she said finally. “I can’t sell you those things except by precription."

“I know,” I said. “But you see, I’m a doctor. I don’t need a precription.” She was still fidgeting. “Well... you’ll have to show me some I.D.,” she moaned.

“Of course.” I jerked out my wallet and let her see the police basge while I flipped through the deck until I located my Ecclesiastical Discount Card—which identifies me as a Doctor of Divinity, a certified Minister of the Church of the New Truth.

She inspected it carefully, then handed it back. I sensed a new respect in her manner. Her eyes grew warm. She seemed to want to touch me. “I hope you’ll forgive me, Doctor.” she said with a fine smile. “But I had to ask. We get some real freaks in this place. All kinds of dangerous addicts. You’d never believe it."

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I understand perfectly. but I have a bad heart, and I hope—"

“Certainly!” she exclaimedand within seconds she was back with a dosen amyls. I paid without quibbling about the ecclesiastical discount. Then I opened the box and cracked one under my nose immediately, while she watched.

“Just be thankful your heart is young and strong,” I said. “If I were you I would never...ah...holy shit!...what? Yes, you'll have to excuse me now; I feel it coming on.” I turned away and reeled off in the general direction of the bar.

“God's mercy on you swine!” I shouted at two Marines com ing out of the men's room.

They looked at me, but said nothing. By this time I was laughing crazily. But it made no difference. I was just an other fuckedup cleric with a bad heart. Shit, they'll love me down at the Brown Palace. I took another big hit off the amyl, and by the time I got to the bar my heart was full of joy. I felt like a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger...a Man on the Move, and just sick enough to be totally confident.